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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

An Interpretation of Plato's *Lesser Hippias*

by

Liz Anne Alexander

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Science

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1988

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To my mother and father

Abstract

The *Lesser Hippias* is a very strange Platonic dialogue. We meet here a Socrates who seems quite unfamiliar at first glance; one who, in the course of a discussion with the sophist Hippias, propounds such apparently perverse notions as the view that the same man is both truthful and a liar and that those who do injustice voluntarily are better than those who do it involuntarily. Entwined with these "teachings" is a discussion of the relative merits of Odysseus and Achilles; and a parallel contrast is made throughout the work between Hippias and Socrates. By examining the dialogue as a whole, i.e. by considering both its form and substance, this thesis endeavours to reveal the true philosophic teaching of the work, a teaching that comprises such things as the role of lying in human life, the rank order of men, moral culpability, and justice. Rather than being a potentially pernicious work, we will see that the dialogue in fact reveals the true ground of morality.

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I. Introduction

The *Lesser Hippias* is one of Plato's shorter dialogues.[1] It is also one of his most peculiar dialogues. It takes place after an exhibition speech on Homer by Hippias, the famous sophist from Elis who has a great reputation for "wisdom." The speech had been requested by a man named Eudicus, who is the first speaker of the dialogue and seems to be a familial acquaintance of Socrates'. Eudicus is perplexed by Socrates' silence after the sophist's exhibition and wants him to make some sort of comment on the speech. Socrates complies with the request, saying that he would like to ask Hippias about Achilles and Odysseus, and more specifically, who is the better man of the two. The question introduces one of the important themes of the dialogue, the issue of rank. Which human beings are the better ones and why? For it is not only Achilles and Odysseus who are being compared in the work but also Socrates and Hippias, the philosopher and the sophist. Hippias' opinion of his own worth becomes immediately clear when he says, "I've never yet met anyone better than I am in anything." His obtuse vanity is on display throughout the dialogue, in marked contrast to Socrates' "humble" demeanour. In answering Socrates' question, Hippias evaluates not only Achilles and Odysseus, but also Nestor, although Socrates had only asked about the first two. For Hippias, Achilles is the best or bravest of the Achaians and Odysseus the most "wily." Socrates is apparently perplexed as to what Hippias means by wily and asks for an explanation. It turns out that for Hippias the wily man is a liar, which is why Odysseus is worse than Achilles. Socrates now questions Hippias' assumption

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[1] The primary translation used is the literal one by James Leake in the *The Roots of Political Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Pangle, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 281-99. Any variations will be noted. Greek texts consulted are the J. Burnet, Oxford edition, *Platonis Opera*, Tomvs III, Tetralogias v-vii Continens, (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1903), and the Loeb Classical Library edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).
References to the *Lesser Hippias* will be noted in parentheses within the text. All other references, unless noted, will be in footnotes.

that truthful men and liars are different, and the first "proof" of the dialogue is launched. By means of a transparently "sophistical" argument, Hippias is easily forced to admit that far from being different men, liars and truth-tellers are the very same, and moreover that they are "the wise and capable of lying." He fails to see that his agreement here conflicts with his initial proposition that Achilles is better because he is truthful and Odysseus worse because he is a liar. When Socrates proceeds to *remind* him of this (part of Hippias' claim to fame is the possession of great mnemonic skills), Hippias responds by criticizing Socrates' method and offering to save his original statements by means of a speech. Socrates counters by apparently demonstrating, with examples from the *Iliad*, that Achilles is in fact a liar. Faced with such "proof" of Achilles' dissembling, Hippias attempts to salvage his initial position by saying that Achilles lied "involuntarily" and "guilelessly," whereas "When ... Odysseus speaks the truth he always speaks by design, and whenever he lies it is the same." Hippias seems convinced that anyone who self-consciously chooses to lie is immoral. It is a conviction whose validity is challenged throughout the dialogue.

Odysseus is now said by Socrates to be better. He defends this judgment by asking Hippias, "Did not those who lie voluntarly just now come to light as better than those doing so involuntarily?" Although it is not clear that this did come to light, certainly one who *always* speaks "by design" would seem to be a more prudent human being. Socrates' question provokes an outburst on Hippias' part as to how Socrates can possibly think that those who do wrong voluntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily. Socrates maintains that this is what he believes although he admits it is something about which he "vacillates." At this point, Hippias seems very hesitant to continue the conversation, and Eudicus' intervention is required for him to do so. The sophist seems to be anxiously aware that his reputation for wisdom, on which his livelihood depends, is taking quite a beating. Once Hippias is cajoled to continue the

discussion, the second "proof" of the dialogue--which attempts to show that what Hippias finds so repugnant is indeed true--is initiated. In the course of it, Socrates uses a wide range of examples to apparently prove, again in an obviously "sophistical" manner, that the one who voluntarily does what is "bad" is better than one who does so involuntarily. Hippias assents to all of Socrates' assertions until he is asked whether the soul is "better if it effects evil voluntarily and goes wrong or if it does so involuntarily." Although his previous admissions do imply this, Hippias maintains that this conclusion would be something "terrible." Socrates seems to make one last attempt to convince the sophist that such a soul is indeed better by inquiring about justice itself. Hippias again assents to Socrates' assertions till faced with the conclusion that "he who voluntarily goes wrong and does what is shameful and unjust ... would be no other than the good man," with which he says he cannot agree. Socrates responds that the argument does appear to show this, but the dialogue ends "aporetically," with Socrates confessing that he can scarcely agree with himself about this conclusion and that he continually vacillates about these things, and lamenting how terrible it is that the "wise" such as Hippias should also vacillate.

Of the many peculiar aspects of this dialogue, arguably the strangest are the two main propositions that Socrates propounds, namely, that the same man is both truthful and a liar and that one who does injustice voluntarily is better than one who does it involuntarily. But this is not all that is perplexing about it. The dialogue's subject is not a "grand" idea like courage, philosophy, the just, or the beautiful. On the surface, there does not even appear to be a coherent theme. The traditional subtitle "On the Lie" seems as apt a description of it as anything else. But although the first proof deals with "the lie," the subject of lying seems relegated to the background by the beginning of the second proof. Moreover, in a dialogue on this subject, we may have expected to witness a more systematic examination of lying, including such things as definitions,

and when it should and should not be engaged in. This is not to say that closer analysis will not reveal the appropriateness of the subtitle, but merely to point out that the dialogue has a very perplexing outer layer. The role of Achilles and Odysseus further complicates matters. They are discussed at the beginning and the middle of the dialogue but are unmentioned after Socrates says that Odysseus must be better than Achilles. It is as though the question of their rank order has been superceded by some new question. Besides these considerations, the arguments that Socrates presents in defense of his rather bizarre propositions are patently--indeed, outrageously--"sophistical," i.e. not intended to arrive at the truth but employed merely to win a contest in arguing. One wonders what the implication of all this could be.

What is not surprising, however, is that the *Lesser Hippias* should have been considered spurious by early nineteenth century scholars such as Schleiermacher and his student Frederich Ast, even despite Aristotle's evidence to the contrary.[2] Ast apparently "... called it sophistical and saw in it the seeds of moral indifferentism...."[3] It is not difficult to see why he might have felt this way. The arguments are certainly sophistical; and compared with the lofty pronouncements on justice and the good in the *Republic*, the central tenets of the *Lesser Hippias*--that the truthful man and the liar are the same person and that the person who does injustice voluntarily is better than one who does it involuntarily--seem positively perverse. These views fly in the face of common sense. We tend to think of honest people and liars as quite distinct kinds of characters. To be sure the former may at times find it necessary to lie, but they do so for good reasons, whereas the latter lie for the wrong reasons, i.e. for unjust reasons--usually in order to gratify their desires (of body and soul) at the expense of others. But Socrates does not make any sort of explicit distinction between lying for good as

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[2] Aristotle refers to the dialogue in the *Metaphysics* 1025a6.
[3] Michael O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind*, (Durham, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 99.

opposed to bad reasons in the *Lesser Hippias*. The only distinction that he makes in lying, and doing "injustice" generally (see 372d4-8), is the one between voluntary and involuntary instances of these actions. Socrates maintains that those who lie or do unjust things voluntarily are "better" than those who do so involuntarily. In the process, he seems to take our normal conception of "morality," that those who knowingly do evil are culpable, and stand it on its head. The teaching implies, for example, that a self-conscious and willing killer is "better" than one who kills accidently. This is surely a strange kind of "better," and might even be called a heinous teaching.

Perhaps an old tradition that distinguished between the "esoteric" and "exoteric" teachings of philosophic writings will aid us in understanding this strange little work. According to this tradition, there is a "gulf separating 'the wise' and 'the vulgar' ... which could not be influenced by any progress of popular education: philosophy, or science, was essentially a privilege of 'the few.'"[4] Because the truth is not always something pleasant, one who spoke or wrote it without consideration for the effect this could have on "the many" would be neither decent nor prudent.[5] Thus, it is felt, the philosophers of old wrote works which convey one teaching on the surface, something more conventional and politically salutary; and another, more radical or dangerous or demanding, beneath it. What characterizes the former, or "the popular teaching" is that it is "of an edifying character."[6] But this certainly seems to be at odds with what the *Lesser Hippias* conveys at first blush. We note, however, that Socrates is careful to insist at the end that he also finds it difficult to agree with the strange conclusion that has been reached--that it is the good man "who voluntarily goes wrong and does what

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[4] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 34.
[5] Strauss, p. 36.
[6] Strauss, p. 36; see also Strauss, *The City and Man*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 53-4.

is shameful and unjust"--and that it is a matter about which he is confused. This mitigates the surface teaching's pernicious effect; the whole issue is thrown into radical doubt, and the reader is not sure one way or another as to how these matters stand.

The peculiarities of the *Lesser Hippias* cause those who are inclined to study Plato with preconceived notions of what his teaching is to dismiss the dialogue altogether as spurious (like Ast), or to presume it is one of his earlier and less "philosophical" works.[7] Others seem to get bogged down in the particular arguments without trying to understand it as a whole.[8] But a more prudent approach would seem to be that of assuming that the ancient authorities were correct in regarding the *Lesser Hippias* as genuine, and thus that Plato had reasons for everything that is said and done in the dialogue, reasons that will illuminate the true philosophic teaching of the work. Unlike Ast and many modern commentators, then, this author accepts responsibility for explaining the *why's* of the dialogue. This obviously necessitates an examination of both the dramatic form of the work as well as its arguments.[9] As Allan Bloom says about analyzing Plato's works,

> Every argument must be interpreted dramatically, for every argument is incomplete in itself and only the context can supply the missing links. And every dramatic detail must be interpreted philosophically,

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[7] See Robin Waterfield's introduction to his translation of the *Lesser Hippias*in *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues*, (Harmondsworth, Engl.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1987), pp. 270-1. See also Terry Penner, "Socrates on Virtue and Motivation," in *Phronesis*, Supplementary Vol. I, (Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., Assen, 1973), p. 151. Penner assumes that the *Lesser Hippias* expounds Socratic theory as distinguished from the teaching of the Plato of the *Republic*.

[8] See J.J. Mulhern, "ΤΡΟΠΟΣ and ΠΟΛΥΤΡΟΠΙΑ in Plato's *Hippias Minor*," in *Phoenix*, 22, (1968), pp. 283-288; and also Roslyn Weiss, "Ο Αγαθοσ as Ο Δυνατοσ in the *Hippias Minor*," in *Classical Quarterly*, 31 (ii), (Great Britain, 1981), pp. 287-304.
An indication of the danger of this approach is the view, found in both works but especially in Weiss', that Socrates is having a serious conversation with the sophist. see Mulhern, p. 286; Weiss, p. 291.

[9] O'Brien recognizes the need for this type of analysis and provides some astute comments on the role of Hippias in the dialogue. (see pp. 100-3) Where he misinterprets the dialogue is in thinking that Socrates also classifies lying as "immoral" (p. 104), which causes him to entirely disregard this aspect of the work; and in thinking that the later analogy of justice with the arts is unproblematic--he assumes that justice *is* good for the soul. (see pp. 104-6)
Leake's commentary overcomes part of this problem with a lucid analysis of the role of lying in the *Lesser Hippias*. See *Roots*, pp. 303-5. His short essay is quite inadequate, however, in handling the problem of the respective merits of voluntary versus involuntary evil-doers.

> because these details contain the images of the problems which complete the arguments. Separately these two aspects are meaningless; together they are an invitation to the philosophic quest.[10]

The study of Plato is in fact more akin to the study of Shakespeare than to what is commonly thought of as philosophic analysis:

> One cannot understand Plato's teaching as he meant it if one does not know what the Platonic dialogue is. One cannot separate the understanding of Plato's teaching from the understanding of the form in which it is presented. One must pay as much attention to the How as to the What. At any rate to begin with one must pay even greater attention to the 'form' than to the 'substance,' since the meaning of the 'substance' depends on the 'form.' One must postpone one's concern with the most serious questions (the philosophic questions) in order to become engrossed in the study of a merely literary question.[11]

Examining such things as characterization, setting, and the actions of the participants as well as their arguments, may well dispel the "weirdness" of the *Lesser Hippias*. Certainly the issues discussed are of crucial importance in human life: the rank order of men, lying, moral culpability, and justice. What light does this enigmatic little work throw on these matters?

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[10] Allan Bloom, "Preface" to *The Republic of Plato*, transl. by Bloom, (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1968), p. xvi.

[11] Strauss, *City*, p. 52.

Strauss goes on to say that the "literary question," i.e. "the question of presentation," is itself of philosophic importance because it deals with communication which "is living together" for human beings and because the pursuit of truth "is necessarily ... a common quest, a quest taking place through communication." He thinks that "the literary question properly understood is the question of the relation between society and philosophy." p. 52. The question of writing is brought to the fore in this dialogue because of the important role Homer plays in it. One remembers the "old quarrel" between the philosopher and the poet. It may be that the voluntary lie may have as much to do with writing as with speech.

II. Socrates' Silence (363a-364b3)

Perhaps the first thing one notices about the *Lesser Hippias* is its name. It is one of two Platonic dialogues with Hippias' name in the title, the other being the *Greater Hippias*. The latter dialogue consists of a conversation between Socrates and Hippias,[1] the major part of which is taken up by a consideration of the nature of the beautiful.[2] Presuming the titles of the dialogues to be Plato's, something we cannot be certain of but there is no reason to suppose otherwise, an obvious question is why one should be called "Lesser" and the other "Greater." Perhaps it is merely because the *Greater Hippias* is twice as long as the *Lesser*; or maybe Hippias himself is portrayed as somehow "greater" in the former. The titles and the identity of the dialogues' interlocuters, however, are not the only links between the two works. The arts of astronomy, geometry, and calculation, which play an important role in the *Lesser Hippias*, are mentioned early on in the *Greater* [3]; Achilles makes an appearance in both works[4]; and there is reference to those who involuntarily do bad things and to intentional deceit in both dialogues.[5] The most obvious connection between the two dialogues, however, is Hippias' reference in the *Greater Hippias* to a speech that he gave recently at Sparta and which apparently garnered him a "great reputation" there.[6] While dealing essentially with the "what a young man ought to pursue," it is set in the context of the Trojan war, and more specifically, in the apparently hypothetical context

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[1] Hippias is also present in Plato's *Protagorus*.

[2] It is important to remember that the Greek uses one word, καλοσ, for both the "beautiful" and the "noble." This may reveal something about the nature of these ideas.
Unfortunately, due to technical limitations, references in Greek occur without accents and breathing signs. Also, sigmas at the ends of words do not have the proper form.

[3] *Greater Hippias*, 285b7 ff. The translation of the Greater Hippias consulted is that of David Sweet in *Roots*, pp 307-339. All subsequent quotations will be from the same translation.

[4] *Gr. Hip.*, 292e12 ff.

[5] *Gr. Hip.*, 296b8 ff., 300d3 ff.

[6] *Gr. Hip.*, 286a3 ff.

of Nestor responding to a question by Neoptolemus about the nature of beautiful pursuits. Hippias tells Socrates that he is going to give this same speech "the day after tomorrow in Pheidostratus' school ... as well as many other things worth hearing, because Eudicus the son of Apemantus has asked me to." (286b4-7) There is little doubt that the speech referred to here is the one that immediately precedes the action of the *Lesser Hippias*. (see 363a ff.) We thus learn this dialogue's location and apparent dramatic date.[7]

Given the obvious connections between the two dialogues, a closer analysis of their relationship would likely prove fruitful. The present essay is primarily a consideration of the *Lesser Hippias*, but the references made herein to the *Greater Hippias* require at least a rudimentary sketching of the events of that dialogue. In this latter work, Socrates appears to encounter Hippias by chance, and voluntarily engages in conversation with him. His first words (and the first words of the dialogue) are, "Hippias, the beautiful and wise, how long a time it's been for us since you have alighted at Athens!"[8] The qualities Socrates names in his epithet were apparently those for which Hippias was famous. Sweet notes that "No other dialogue begins with a proper name in the nominative [case], and no other person addressed in the first sentence of any dialogue is described as fully or as flatteringly as Hippias is."[9] It seems that the reason for Hippias' prolonged absence from Athens is his success as a negotiator for his native city of Elis. Socrates comments on how wonderful it is that Hippias is not only successful in his private activity of receiving money for "helping" the young but also in a public capacity. He wonders why the men of old who were reputed for wisdom did not engage in such "political activities." (281c ff.) Hippias'

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[7] The *Greater Hippias* is supposed to have taken place about 420 B.C. Sweet, *Roots*, p. 307.
[8] *Gr. Hip.*, 281a1-2. Subsequent references to the *Greater Hippias* during this summary of the dialogue will be noted within the text in parentheses.
[9] Sweet, "Introduction to the Greater Hippias," in *Roots*, p. 342.

response is that they lacked both the "power" and the "prudence" to be successful in both spheres. Socrates asks Hippias if this means that the art of the sophists has advanced from times past, which Hippias most assuredly affirms. Socrates says that he can support Hippias' opinion, and refers as evidence to how Gorgias and Prodicus came to Athens on public business and at the same time made a great deal of money by giving "exhibition speeches and associating with the youth." (282b ff.) Socrates wonders at the "naivety" of the men of old, none of whom "ever thought it worthy to earn money as a wage or to make exhibitions of his own wisdom before all sorts of human beings...." (282c7-d1), whereupon Hippias boasts of his superiority to all other sophists in being able to make money. Socrates makes some further comments on this activity of "wise" men earning wages and then asks which city has proven most fruitful for Hippias in this regard. Socrates thinks that it cannot have been Lacedaemon (which Hippias has said he has made the most visits to as an envoy for Elis). Hippias swears that this is so; he has, in fact, made no money there. (283b8 ff.) This precipitates a discussion on the Spartan regime, which does not allow foreigners to educate its citizens, and on the rightness of laws that prevent the young in that city from being "benefitted" by sophists like Hippias. It seems, though, that the Spartans do enjoy hearing speeches by Hippias on "the generation of heroes and of human beings and the founding of cities" and so forth. (285d8 ff.) At this point in the dialogue, Hippias refers to the speech that he will give two days hence at Pheidostratus' school.

Hippias tells Socrates to be at the exhibition himself and bring others as well. (286b7 ff.) Socrates, however, is noncommital about whether he will be present, shifting that responsibility onto "God." But he asks the sophist to "give [him] a brief answer about it...." for now. (286c3 ff.) Apparently "someone" recently made him aware of his ignorance about the beautiful, which he asks Hippias to remedy. Socrates proposes to "imitate" this stranger, raising "his" objections to and questions about

Hippias' account. According to Socrates, if Hippias "should exhibit to [the stranger] this speech ... the one about the beautiful pursuits, he would listen to it, and once [Hippias] had stopped speaking, he would ask about nothing else sooner than about the beautiful--for this is a certain custom of his--and he would say, 'Stranger from Elis, isn't it by justice that the just are just?'" (287a4 ff.) Hippias answers the latter question and the discussion of the beautiful is launched. Throughout the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates plays both his own part and that of the stranger. Hippias offers various definitions of the beautiful--that it is a beautiful maiden; that it is gold; and that it is a man blessed by the gods who has buried his parents well, being "beautifully and magnificently buried by his own offspring"--all of which are comically refuted by Socrates.[10] Socrates then offers a definition that the stranger proposes and several of his own which also turn out to be inadequate. Faced with all this, Hippias advises Socrates to forget his "little speeches" and instead compose beautiful speeches for political purposes which are "the salvation of oneself and one's money and friends." (304a5 ff.) The dialogue ends, as does the *Lesser Hippias*, with Socrates saying that he vacillates. But on the earlier occasion he attributes his vacillation to "some daemonic fate." Socrates says that when he reveals his perplexity on this subject to the "wise ones" such as Hippias they ridicule him, but if he follows their advice he is "called all sorts of bad things by some others here and by this fellow who always refutes me." (304d2-4) The stranger is able to do so it seems because he lives in the same house as Socrates and is a very close relation! He castigates Socrates for speaking about the beautiful when he has no idea what it is, and apparently believes that one in such a condition is better off dead. Socrates says that although he is thus reproached on both sides, he may have to bear such things because it might help him in some way. Apparently, the immediate encounter with both Hippias and the stranger has been

[10] Plato has employed an especially deft comic touch throughout this dialogue.

helpful, for now Socrates seems "to know what the proverb means that says, 'The beautiful things are difficult.'"

The conversation in the *Greater Hippias* clearly shows how little Hippias has thought about the idea of the beautiful, although he feels free to speak about "beautiful pursuits." His views are repeatedly shown to be incorrect, if not ridiculous, and by the end of the dialogue when all that he had either proposed or agreed to as being the beautiful is shown to be unacceptable he merely criticizes Socrates' approach, not for a moment wondering whether his own understanding of these things is seriously flawed. Paradoxical as it might seem, the revelation of Hippias' ignorance in this dialogue may have something to do with why the "god" has been willing, i.e. why Socrates is present at the sophist's subsequent exhibition.

Like the *Greater Hippias*, the *Lesser Hippias* has a direct dramatic structure. We mean by that that there is no narration in the work, either by Socrates or anyone else. Besides what we know of the circumstances from the *Greater Hippias*, we, the readers of the *Lesser Hippias*, have access to no other information about this particular conversation than the actual words of the participants to each other (whereas a narrated dialogue allows for certain asides to the audience). If we were wholly dependent on the resources of the latter dialogue, we would know neither the exact location of its conversation, nor its dramatic date. We would know only that Hippias' exhibition was made somewhere "inside" to a large throng of people. (see 364b4-9) Some smaller but indefinite portion of this audience, including Eudicus and Socrates and Hippias, are the participants (some vocal, some silent) in the dialogue. They may still be inside the school of Pheidostratus, given Eudicus' statement that "... we alone are left [left behind] who would particularly make claim to share in the pursuit of philosophy." (363a4-6) But the fact that there is no reference to the school of Pheidostratus in the *Lesser Hippias*, nor any other indication of when the conversation is taking place, may

mean that the precise locale and current political situation are of less importance here than in dialogues where they can be directly established.

The first speaker of the dialogue is Eudicus. There are no historical references to him other than those in the *Greater* and the *Lesser Hippias*.[11] From these two works we learn that he is the son of a certain Apemantus, who similarly is otherwise unknown, and almost surely an Athenian, given his apparently long-standing acquaintance with Socrates (as discussed below). In Greek, Eudicus' name means "righteous dealing" or "justice," a fact not without some implication for the dialogue. He is apparently surprised at Socrates' silence after the great rhetorical display from Hippias. Everyone else seems to have been impressed by the sophist's abilities (see 363a2-3), and Eudicus supposes that Socrates too will have found the speech to be "finely spoken"; but if Socrates has not he wants him to at least "refute something" (η και ελεγχεισ). (363a1-4) According to Eudicus, those remaining "would particularly make claim to share in the pursuit of philosophy." (353a5-6) Eudicus' use of the term here is the only occurrence of the word "philosophy" in the dialogue. Socrates says nothing about the merit of this claim. Perhaps his subsequent actions will throw some light on this question. Socrates' silence after Hippias' exhibition, however, implies that he may have found the sophist's words to be less than fine. About the middle of the dialogue--when Hippias' quite conventional, quite respectable views about the truthful man and the liar have been refuted by Socrates, provoking an attack by Hippias on the "Socratic method"--Socrates seems to provide some rather explicit criteria by which one may determine whom he considers it worthwhile to question. Although anyone who speaks may merit his initial attention, it is those speakers Socrates deems wise that he chooses to question "thoroughly," whereas those he thinks to be of "little account" he does not question at all. (369d2-e3; see also 372b1-2) Given Socrates' initial silence

[11] Leake, *Roots*, p. 300.

and his pointed reference later to Eudicus having requested him to speak (see 364b8-c1), one suspects that Hippias is held in little regard by the philosopher. The fact that he seems to voluntarily converse with the sophist in the *Greater Hippias* does not necessarily conflict with this interpretation. The contrast between the two dialogues may have been intended to reveal a change in Socrates' estimation of Hippias from the beginning of one to the beginning of the other.

Although the dramatic comparison between Socrates' initial behavior and his stated general policy of being "indefatigable in questioning the wise" (372b1-2) is certainly meant to suggest *something*, if Socrates has no intention of conversing with Hippias, his continued presence at the school of Pheidostratus is rather puzzling. We note that once Eudicus asks him to speak, Socrates does not seem to require much encouragement to do so; he tells Eudicus that "Indeed ... there are some things, among those Hippias just now said about Homer, that I would ask him about with pleasure." (363b1-3) And he shortly affirms again that he will question Hippias "with pleasure." (see also 363b7) Is it only politeness that causes him to say this, or is there something about the following conversation that will gratify Socrates, will give him pleasure? As noted above, Socrates' first words to Hippias in the *Greater Hippias* were, "Hippias, the beautiful and wise....," these being the qualities for which Hippias was famous. If Hippias were indeed wise, it seems reasonable to assume that he would know more about something as important to human life as beauty, or at least to have given the matter more thought than he provides any evidence of. Conversely, if he neither knows anything about the nature of the beautiful, nor is aware of his ignorance, he cannot in truth lay claim to being wise. The questioning of Hippias in the *Greater Hippias*, then, may be seen as a test of the sophist's knowledge, a test which he abjectly fails. His claim to wisdom is therefore a spurious one. Since Socrates now knows this, it is unlikely that he goes to the school of Pheidostratus to further assure himself of

Hippias' lack of wisdom. But perhaps he goes there to reveal this fact to some of his fellow Athenians. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates relates how his habit of examining the "wise" began as an attempt to refute the Delphic oracle's proclamation that "no one was wiser" than him.[12] He soon discovered, however, that those who considered themselves wise and were reputed to be so, were, in fact, even more ignorant than himself; for they were unaware of their ignorance. This made him realize that the god was merely using him to reveal that "human wisdom is worth little or nothing," and that the wisest of men is one "'who, like [him], has become cognizant that in truth he is worth nothing with respect to wisdom.'" Socrates says that he continues to serve the god in this way:

> ... even now I still go around seeking and investigating in accordance with the god any townsman or foreigner I suppose to be wise. And whenever someone does not seem so to me, I come to the god's aid and show that he is not wise.

Socrates' examination of Hippias in the *Lesser Hippias* may very well be an example of the latter type of deed, a rather peculiar act of piety it seems.

Eudicus' wish that Socrates either praise or refute Hippias' speech reveals that he holds Socrates' opinion in some regard. We should note, however, that once Socrates agrees to speak, he neither praises nor refutes anything Hippias said in his great public display of rhetorical power, at least not immediately. He chooses, instead, to question the sophist about his opinion concerning certain portrayals by Homer, specifically about Achilles and Odysseus. In the course of his speech, Hippias has apparently "... exhibited *many other* things of *every* kind both about other poets and about Homer," (363c2-3; emphasis added) but not what would seem to be one of the central questions in Homer, i.e. the respective ranking of his two most famous protagonists. This may be an indication of Hippias' lack of judgment as to what the important issues really are.

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12 *Apology*, 21a ff., transl. from *Four Texts on Socrates*, by Thomas West & Grace S. West, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). All subsequent quotations will be from the same translation.

The way Socrates chooses to introduce his question is a bit odd, however; Socrates says that he "used to hear" from Eudicus' father Apemantus "that the *Iliad* of Homer is a more beautiful [noble] poem than the *Odyssey*, and more beautiful [noble] in the measure that Achilles is a better man than Odysseus," the two poems being made about these two men respectively. (363b3-7) (Socrates and Apemantus were apparently well-enough acquainted such that Socrates can speak as if in times past he heard the father's views repeatedly.) Socrates would like to find out Hippias' views on the matter, what his "opinion" is of Achilles and Odysseus and which he thinks to be the better man. (363b8-9) According to Apemantus' reported position, the answer to this question answers the question of the respective merits of the two poems. But this does not seem right. No one would argue, for example, that *Henry V* is a better play than *Macbeth* because Henry V is a better man.[13] Socrates may have raised this issue to alert us to the danger of identifying the merits of the *Iliad* as a poem with those of Achilles as a man. But he did not need to refer to Eudicus' father to convey this point. We soon see that Hippias does share Apemantus' opinion that Achilles is better than Odysseus. Perhaps the reference to an apparently ordinary man's views is intended to show that Hippias' opinions are likewise very ordinary. The fact that Apemantus is Eudicus' father may serve as a subtle indication of why Eudicus is enamored of the sophist.

The significance of Apemantus being mentioned may also have something to do with the fact that the latter portion of his name means soothsayer or seer. One implication might have to do with the connection between justice (i.e. Eudicus) and prophecy (i.e. Apemantus). It would seem that the latter is often the father of the former. History is certainly filled with examples of codes of justice being embedded within stories of the divine, from Moses' laws to the Koran. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

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[13] In fact, great works of literature seem more often than not to be populated with "worse" men and women.

seem to have played similar roles in ancient Greece. In the *Republic*, Plato teaches us that even the *best* city requires tales involving divine powers in order to *justify* the existing regime or government.[14] Insofar as such tales are more fiction than fact, "noble lies" if one prefers, the false seems to have a very important role in human life.

So far Hippias has not said anything; he has not even been directly addressed. Eudicus feels that there can be no question of Hippias not answering Socrates; and when he turns to Hippias himself, the manner of his questions leaves the sophist little choice, having something of an air of challenge about them. (see 363c4-6) Eudicus' assumption about Hippias' willingness to answer Socrates is borne out by the sophist's first words. He feels he would be doing "strange/terrible"[15] things if he were to refuse to answer Socrates, he who always goes to the Olympic games and presents himself there "in the temple to speak on whatever anyone may wish from among those things I have prepared for exhibition and to answer whatever anyone who wishes should ask." (363c7 ff.) The fact that Hippias' exhibitions at Olympia took place in the temple might seem odd in light of the fact that Socrates was accused and convicted of impiety for his investigations. It would appear that whatever the nature of Hippias' wisdom, it did not threaten the conventional Greek notions of the gods. Socrates ironically flatters Hippias in response. He specifically compares Hippias' experience at Olympia to those of the athletes and introduces the notion of competing for wisdom. (364a1-5) Hippias does not find that at all strange, since it appears that there is some sort of competition for learning at Olympia which he has always won. The fact that he is a sophist, one whose

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14 *Republic*, 414b7 ff.

15 The Greek word, δεινοσ, can also mean "clever," which is not an irrelevant interpretation here since a standard view of sophists was that they were clever speakers. This was, in fact, one of the accusations made against Socrates in Plato's *Apology*. (17a ff.) In refuting this charge, Socrates says that he, unlike his accusers who have delivered "beautifully spoken speeches ... adorned with phrases and words," speaks the truth.
In Thomas West's analysis of this section of the *Apology*, he says that "Socrates seems to suggest that truthful speech cannot be persuasive speech, or, in other words, that what is true can never be shared by many men because it cannot be presented convincingly to them," p. 17.

private income and public missions depend on his reputation for wisdom, implies that he must regard this conversation with Socrates too as something of a contest. Hippias' answer to Socrates reveals both his boastfulness and his careless thinking. He says that "... since I began contending for victory at Olympia, I've never yet met *anyone* better than I am in *anything*." (364a6-8; emphasis added) The word he uses here for "better" is κρειττων (not αμεινων, which Socrates had used; 363b2) The former more specifically than the latter means "stronger," and originally in the bodily sense. This emphasizes the falseness of Hippias' claim even more, for obviously the athletes at Olympia are better than him in body. It may be objected that Hippias' overlooking of the athletes is a small matter, but in a dialogue where those who lie involuntarily are shown to be worse than those who do so voluntarily, it is not insignificant that Socrates' interlocuter in the matter so quickly shows himself to be "worse."

Socrates' response to this amazingly hubristic claim is interesting. He does not openly criticize Hippias, but instead apparently praises him. A careful consideration of his words, however, reveals a different picture. He says to the sophist, "It is a fine [καλον] thing indeed you're saying, Hippias--that your reputation is a monument of wisdom both for the city of the Eleans and for your parents." (364b2-3) Since most human beings are not wise, for someone to have a reputation for wisdom, in his own lifetime at least, is rather paradoxical. In order to be praised by the people, does not one have to say things that are pleasing to them, and not necessarily what is true? Hippias may have acquired such a reputation simply by articulating what the many think more beautifully than they can themselves. Perhaps this is why Socrates calls his reputation a *monument of wisdom* for Elis and for his parents, because it commemorates the "wisdom" of the people.[16] This interpretation of Socrates' statement presumes it to be

[16] The only true monument of a quality or idea like wisdom would seem to be creations that allow human beings to understand its worth for themselves. One thinks of Plato's corpus or Homer's poems

an example of Socratic irony, speech that is both true and false and which says different things to different people. But Socrates' words also contain a more blatant falsehood. Hippias did not say anything about honour accruing to either his city or his parents as a result of his successes. There is no evidence that this is an involuntary falsehood on Socrates' part. The reason for the lie may be that Socrates is trying to heal Hippias of his montrous conceit, or at least reveal it to others, by showing him how to properly handle the reputation that he has acquired for himself. It would be more "noble" to deflect the attention away from himself and towards those who have at least some claim to his gratitude.

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for example. Their continuing significance to all human beings is not because they eulogize long-dead men, but because their study allows one to actively pursue wisdom, i.e. to philosophize.

III. Achilles and Odysseus (364b3-365d5)

Socrates quickly brings Hippias' attention back to the matter at hand. He asks Hippias what his opinion is about Achilles and Odysseus and which of the two he thinks is better and "in what respect." (364b3-4) But before Hippias has a chance to answer, Socrates tells Hippias, and the others who remain (as well as the readers), something of his experience during the sophist's exhibition. Apparently he "was left behind" by what Hippias said because of his reluctance to question the sophist during his speech.[1] Socrates explains his reluctance as due to two factors: the large number of people "inside," and because he did not want to "interfere" with the exhibition. (364b7-8) Neither condition applies any longer; although, as discussed above, their absence was not initially sufficient to make Socrates question Hippias. It is Eudicus' pointed intervention and the fact that there are "fewer" remaining that seem to be the deciding factors in Socrates' embarking on this conversation: "... but now, since there are fewer of us and Eudicus here bids me to ask, speak out and teach us clearly, what were you saying about these two men?" (364b9) One wonders why the dissipation of the "large crowd" should make Socrates more willing to speak. Is Socrates implying that some questions are just not fit for the ears of the "many"[2]? (see 364b7) As will be seen below, the nature of the subsequent discussion lends credence to this view.[3] This is the first indication we have had that Socrates may, in fact, agree with Eudicus' claim that those remaining "would particularly make claim to share in the pursuit of philosophy."

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[1] Leake's translation does not make the cause of Socrates' being left behind clear, not taking account of the γαρ. The sentence should read, "... I was left behind by the things you said, *for* I hesitated to question you...." (364b6-7) Socrates says later that when he wants "to learn what [a speaker] is saying, I question him thoroughly and consider again and compare the things said, so that I may understand." (369d4-6)

[2] οχλοσ can mean the populace, as well as crowd, mob, etc.

[3] The dialogue can, of course, be read by just about anyone, which may partly account for its perplexing character.

Whatever unusual notions are encountered later in the dialogue, they arise from a consideration of subjects that would have been as familiar to an educated Greek as Hamlet and Macbeth were to an educated Englishman of the nineteeenth century.[4] Socrates' choice of subjects may have been constrained by the things that Hippias has talked about during his exhibition, but there were "many other things of every kind both about other poets and about Homer" in his speech. (363c2-3) The fact, then, that Socrates chooses to ask Hippias about Achilles and Odysseus implies that there may be a special significance to this question. Perhaps he knows the direction the conversation will take, at least initially, and brings up this subject because he wants to discuss the nature of lying in this particular situation.[5] But beyond this possibility there may be a more general reason for Socrates' asking about Achilles and Odysseus. If, as has often been stated, Homer is the teacher of the Greeks, then the nature of the two main protagonists in his epics is a very important question, pointing to the core of what he in fact teaches. If they are similar men, the question of their importance would come down to one of whether Homer was right in his portrayal of human greatness. But if they are very different from each other, as seems to be the case, one of the most significant tasks in interpreting Homer would be to ascertain the differences between the two and determine which, if either, is the higher or better example for men to follow. But Achilles and Odysseus are not the only men being compared in the dialogue. We must not forget the two main interlocuters, one a "lover of wisdom," the other a self-proclaimed "wise man." Who should someone like Eudicus, who aspires to be philosophical (he says he is a "pursuer of philosophy"), look to for guidance? The

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[4] This very familiarity may explain Hippias' incredulity when Socrates tries to convince him that Achilles is not, in fact, better than Odysseus. Although Homer's protagonists are obviously different from these two of Shakespeare's, we may get a taste of Hippias' disbelief if we imagine someone trying to convince us that Macbeth is "better" than Hamlet.

[5] Since the conventional view appeared to be that Achilles was the superior hero while Odysseus was famous for being a liar, it is not difficult to surmise that asking Hippias who the better man is and why, would lead to a discussion of lying.

contrast between Socrates and Hippias, which is still a background issue at this point, will become more pronounced as the dialogue proceeds.

Hippias, although he has heard the question three times, does not seem to notice Socrates' emphasis on Achilles and Odysseus. He says that he is willing to speak not only about these two men but others also (364c3-5), and in his answer to Socrates comments on Nestor as well. The reason for this lack of focus may be the fact that this is a "stock" answer. Sophists apparently specialized in giving carefully crafted "set pieces" as evidence of their knowledge. Hippias himself seemed to allude to this when he spoke earlier of his willingness at the Olympic festivals "... to speak on whatever anyone may wish *from among those things I have prepared for exhibition* ...." (363d3-4; emphasis added) According to Hippias, then, "... Homer represented Achilles as the best man of those who came to Troy, Nestor as the wisest, and Odysseus as the most crafty/wily." (364c5-7)[6] Socrates professes himself bewildered by the final part of this answer. But before he expresses his seeming confusion, he asks for a favour on Hippias' part, that he refrain from ridiculing him if Socrates should find the discussion hard to follow and repeatedly question Hippias, and requests, "Instead, try to answer me gently and calmly." (364c8-d2) Socrates seems to be well acquainted with the sophist's actual temperament, which will surface at various points later on during the discussion, and which belies his gracious words at the beginning of this little drama. For Hippias says it would be "shameful" if he were not to comply with Socrates'

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[6] Leake's use of "versatile" for πολυτροποσ is a singularly bad choice, because it gives no indication of how Hippias can think that such a one is a liar. "Crafty" or "wily" (which is used by the Loeb translation and will be used here) are much more appropriate translations of the term in this dramatic context.
The word used here for "best," αριστον, also means "bravest" which is its usual meaning in Homer. (see Leake, 282) That Hippias is using the word in the former sense is indicated by the fact that he thinks Odysseus is worse than Achilles because he lies: "... I will display to you in an ample speech with many proofs that Homer represented Achilles as better than Odysseus and not a liar, while he represented the latter as treacherous, frequently lying, and worse than Achilles." (369c3-6) But if Achilles is "best" in Hippias' eyes, Nestor is the "wisest" of the Achaians. For one who so proud of his own wisdom, it seems rather curious that the wisest of the Achaians has no claim to being best.

request since he thinks it fit to charge money to teach others these very same things. (364d3-6) We are reminded that Hippias has quite a bit at stake here. In the *Greater Hippias*, when Socrates talks about how the sophists Gorgias and Prodicus, while on public business at Athens, made a great deal of money by "making exhibition speeches and associating with the youth," Hippias is prompted to speak of his proficiency in this regard, which he concludes by saying, "Why, I almost suppose that I have earned more money than any other two sophists--whichever ones you wish."[7] Hippias' exhibition at Pheidostratus' school and willingness to answer Socrates' questions, then, are likely motivated primarily by pecuniary considerations.

Socrates seems to take Hippias' words at face value, saying that the sophist has spoken very well or finely. (363d7)[8] Perhaps Socrates is pleased at Hippias' calm demeanor at this point in the conversation. He proceeds, nonetheless, to express his difficulty with Hippias' answer concerning the better man. He says that he has no problem understanding Hippias' description of Achilles and Nestor, but has absolutely no idea what he means by calling Odysseus "wiliest." (364d7-e4) We note that Socrates prefaces his perplexity by saying, "... in this case, to tell you the truth...." As this is the first occurrence of any cognate of the word "truth" in the dialogue, a dialogue concerned to a large extent with lying, perhaps one may be excused for wondering if Socrates is so in the dark about the meaning of "wily" as he claims. Socrates asks if Achilles has "not been represented by Homer as wily?" (364e5-6) Taking the most common meaning of πολυτροποσ, which is "much travelled," one would have to say that Achilles is also "wily" (though not so much as the post - *Odyssey* Odysseus). Seen in this light, Socrates' question is perhaps not so surprising. But "much-traveled" does not seem to be what Hippias has in mind by πολυτροποσ. He says that Homer has

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[7] *Gr. Hip.*, 282b5ff.

[8] Leake's translation is not quite right, καλωσ is an adverb not an adjective.

not represented Achilles as wily but as "most simple." (364e7) In the sense that one who is much traveled is likely to be more experienced and partake of a more cosmopolitan spirit, "simple" could be understood as implying the opposite of "much traveled," although, once again, this does not seem to be Hippias' intention.[9] What seems to be an integral part of "wily" for Hippias is that such a man is a liar. As an example of Achilles' simplicity, Hippias quotes from the section of the *Iliad* where Achilles is entreated to rejoin the fighting by Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoinix (who have been sent by Agammenon), and says that in these lines "[Homer] shows clearly the manner of each man, how Achilles was both truthful and simple, Odysseus both wily and lying...." (365b3-5)

In the quote, which comes just after Odysseus' speech to him, Achilles says (according to Hippias),

> Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, much-devising Odysseus:
> One surely must speak out without regard to consequences,
> Just as I am going to do and as I think it will be fulfilled;
> For that one is hateful to me as the gates of Hades
> Who hides one thing in his mind but says something else.
> But I will speak, as it is also going to be fulfilled. (365a)

It is true that Achilles *says* here that he deplores men who lie, but that of course is a far cry from proving that Achilles himself is not a liar and that Odysseus is. Given the question at issue, we surely cannot take Achilles' words at face value, as Hippias seems to be doing. The very fact that Achilles speaks disparagingly of those who say one thing while thinking another could itself be a ploy designed to beguile others (granted this is unlikely given the representation of his character elsewhere by Homer, but that is not the immediate point). Hippias may well have a more comprehensive vision of Achilles in mind when he says that he is truthful, but the evidence that he presents for it here is far from sufficient. Similarly, the fact that Achilles may be

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[9] See also Leake, *Roots*, p. 283.

criticizing Odysseus for lying (though, as discussed below, this would *not* seem to be the main intent of his words here, contrary to what Hippias wants to convey) would not prove that his criticism is valid. It is because there is so much other evidence that Odysseus lies (which Hippias himself alludes to momentarily) that the claim that Odysseus is a liar can be accepted so easily. Thus, unless Hippias is practicing his own kind of deceit, the sophist appears to have the "simple" type of soul that he ascribes glowingly to Achilles.

Interestingly, Hippias has not quoted Homer verbatim. He has omitted one line completely, and has made other smaller changes to the text. The first part of the quotation should be:

> Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, much-devising Odysseus:
> One surely must speak out without regard to consequences,
> Just as I am going to do and as I think it will be fulfilled;
> That you may not keep moaning one after another, sitting beside me.
> For that one is hateful ... [10]

The inclusion of the missing line throws a somewhat different light onto the reason for Achilles' complaint about duplicitous men. Rather than being a comment on Odysseus' nature, Achilles appears to have had a different purpose in mind in saying these words. He seems to want the envoys to cut short their entreaties, since what he is about to say is the straightforward, immutable truth.[11] Dropping this line strengthens Hippias' view that Achilles is condemning Odysseus as a liar here (though it does nothing for the sophist's assumption that Odysseus is thus a liar). Hippias, then, is not without tricks

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[10] Leake, *Roots*, 284.

[11] But the question remains: is it sufficient to say that one hates liars in order to convince people that one does not lie? This may be an indication of Achilles' naivety, although most people may be convinced by such a statement; but an Odysseus surely would not be.
Achilles' expression of his hatred of liars at this point may also be coloured by other considerations. He may be lamenting what he now thinks was his naivety in believing that Agammenon truly honoured him, sincerely expressing his hatred of the duplicitous man, as Hippias seems to think. Achilles says of Agamemnon later in the same speech, "He cheated me and he did me hurt. Let him not beguile me/ with words again." *Iliad*, IX.375-6, transl. by Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). All subsequent quotations from the *Iliad* will be from the Lattimore translation unless noted.

of his own in arguing.[12] This is in accord with his reputation as one of the most famous sophists of antiquity. The "revising" of Homer might also show that Hippias is less concerned with the truth of things than for victory in argument. In this respect, he gets a taste of his own medicine, for (as we will see later) Socrates also feels free to misquote Homer. The mere fact that Hippias tampers with Homer is not proof that he is "eristic," for he may be doing so only to convey more clearly what he thinks to be the truth of the matter. His later behaviour, however, tends to confirm the former interpretation.

Socrates does not question the veracity of Hippias' interpretation of Homer, at least not in the first part of the dialogue. He is more interested in Hippias' definition of the wily man, who he now understands is a liar. (365b6 ff.) Hippias says that this is it "precisely." His answer seems indicative of a tendency to mistake the part for the whole; for being wily would seem to entail many other activities than just lying. Socrates concludes that for Homer, then, "the truthful man is one sort and the liar another," emphasizing the point by adding, "and they are not the same." (365c3 ff.) Hippias seems surprised that anyone could conceive of the matter otherwise, and vehemently affirms Socrates' distinction. Socrates now dispenses with Homer for the time being, ostensibly for the reason that "it is impossible to ask him what he was thinking when he composed these verses...." (365d1-2) On the basis that Hippias is in agreement with what *he* said Homer says, Socrates assigns him the responsibility of responding both for the poet and himself. (365d2-5)

But is there any point in referring to Homer (as opposed to his characters) at all given Socrates' statement that one cannot question his intentions when writing? This is

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[12] That the omission is conscious and not an oversight is given credence by the fact that Hippias was famous for having great powers of recollection. He boasts in the *Greater Hippias* that if he "[hears] fifty names just once, I recollect them." (285e8-9) Whatever his difficulty in following an extemporaneous argument, then, he probably knew every verse of the *Iliad* .

literally true in a sense of any dead author, and perhaps all that Socrates means here is that a written work must stand on its own merits. There is, however, another more disturbing way of interpreting what Socrates is saying: that in examining the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, one cannot arrive at any coherent understanding of the author's conception of the world and man's role in it.[13] But before leaping to any such conclusions, we have to keep in mind the context in which Socrates says this. He is talking to Hippias after all, and the comment may be intended to reveal something about the sophist's nature rather than about Homer's merit as a poet. A profound understanding of the works of a great poet such as Homer would seem to require qualities of mind and spirit that are far from common, closer perhaps to the poet's own. The implication is that the conventional understanding of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may be very different from what the poet intended his most perspicacious readers to see. Clearly Hippias, as seen so far in both the "Greater" and the "Lesser" dialogues bearing his name, is not such a one. Besides his memory (and the strength of his misguided belief in his own excellence), he possesses no exceptional powers of soul. As Hippias' subsequent remarks about the *Iliad* will amply confirm, it is quite fair to say that it is impossible for *him* to "ask [Homer] what he was thinking...."

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[13] This would then be even harsher criticism than that meted out to the poet in Book X of the *Republic*, where the poet's *particular* view of the whole seems to be the focus of criticism. (see Bloom, 430)

IV. Liars and Truth-tellers (365d6-369a4)

Hippias expresses a ready agreement with Socrates' suggestion that he answer both for himself and Homer, asking Socrates to question him "briefly." (365d6) One presumes the topic of the subsequent investigation will be Hippias' assumption that "... the truthful man is one sort and the liar another ...." Socrates' first questions, however, concern the "power"[1] that liars possess. He asks if Hippias says "that liars are incapable [lack the power] of doing anything, like sick men, or are they capable [do they have the power] of doing something?" (365d7-8) Later in the dialogue, when Socrates asks Hippias to cure him of his ignorance, he implies that ignorance is a sickness of the soul. (see 372e7 ff.) Seen in this light, his question here implies that knowing is a prerequisite to doing. For Hippias, it is obvious that liars are capable, of lying in particular, but of other things as well. (365d9-10) Socrates reiterates that they are capable, dropping the qualification that they are capable of "doing something." He then asks Hippias whether "they are wily and deceiving by foolishness and imprudence or by unscrupulous wickedness and *a certain* prudence?" (365e4-5; emphasis added) There are several things to notice in the phrasing of this question. One is that Socrates seems to implicitly distinguish between wiliness and lying, which accords with our earlier interpretation that Hippias' view that the "precise" definition of the wily man is one who lies (see 365b6-c2) is wrong. Another is the contrived opposition ("imprudence" and "prudence" being natural opposites) between "foolishness" and "unscrupulous wickedness." Socrates' use of "unscrupulous wickedness" (πανουργιασ) is rather conspicuous since he makes no reference to it (or anything similar, e.g. κακοσ or αμαρτανω) again until the middle of the dialogue, when the

[1] The Greek word, δυνατοσ, means "powerful" or "capable." See Leake, p. 284, nt. 6, and also the Loeb translation, 365d8 ff.

discussion has turned to the question of the merits of the voluntarily bad as opposed to those who are involuntarily so. Socrates may be using the term here to increase the likelihood that Hippias will answer that liars are indeed prudent, exploiting Hippias' transparent belief that liars are wicked or evil. And indeed, Hippias emphasizes "unscrupulous wickedness" as the means by which liars lie in his response. (see 365e6) The third thing to notice is Socrates' qualification of the prudence of liars as "a certain [or, sort of] prudence." The implication seems to be that the liar's prudence is not prudence per se. Certainly, there is no question that different human beings possess varying amounts of prudence.

Surprisingly, then, Socrates immediately drops this qualification in his summation that liars are thus prudent. (see 365e7) The first oath of the dialogue occurs in Hippias' response to this summation; he says, "Yes, by Zeus - too much so!" (365e8) Perhaps the emphatic nature of the response is a result of Hippias having been on the receiving end of this kind of prudence. Socrates proceeds to the next step of his argument. He asks, "since [liars] are prudent, do they not know what they are doing, or do they know?" (365e9-10) To Hippias there is no question that they know, this being "why they do evil." (365e11) By knowing, then, it follows that they are wise, or at least it does when Socrates poses the next question as a choice between liars who know being either ignorant or wise. (see 365e12-13) Hippias stresses that liars are wise in "deceiving thoroughly." (365e14-15) At this point in the discussion, Socrates says to him,

> *Stop there*. Let us *recollect* what it is you are saying. You assert that liars are capable, prudent, knowing, and wise in those things in which they are liars. (366a1-3; emphasis added)

One wonders if there some special significance to this imperative. Is it an ironic allusion to Hippias' famous memory, and thus to the impotence of being able to remember names without any ability to rationally connect things? For Socrates certainly takes

some sophistical turns in arriving at this conclusion that appear to go entirely unnoticed by Hippias. As noted above, "unscrupulous wickedness" drops very quickly out of the picture, and with it any notions that liars are morally culpable (when Hippias says that liars do *evil* because they know, this is ignored by Socrates). We have also noted that the prudence of liars undergoes a change from being "a certain prudence" to prudence simply. Insofar as "prudence" is something good, Socrates appears to be referring to a very high calibre of liar, but this is no way bothers Hippias. The question whether liars "know what they are doing" is not as troublesome, at least in the conventional sense of someone being aware of what he is doing.[2] But the step from this sort of knowing to being *wise* per se (see 365e12-13) is quite incredible. We grant that in listing these ostensible virtues of liars (as quoted above), Socrates adds the qualification "in those things in which they are liars," but this still leaves us with a rather bizarre conception of liars. They seem to be endowed with perfect knowledge of that which they lie about.

Hippias does not seem to see any such difficulties in what Socrates says, and acknowledges that this is what *he* asserts. (366a4 ff.) Socrates reminds Hippias of his initial claim that those who tell the truth and those who lie are not the same, which seems to be a warning that what has been agreed to so far will be used against the sophist's initial position. At this point, Socrates sees fit to leave out "knowing" and "prudence" from the discussion[3]; he says to Hippias, "... some of the capable and wise, apparently, are the liars *according to your argument*." (366a8-9; emphasis added) The numerous references to Hippias saying or asserting or arguing these points about

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[2] In the sense of having true understanding of what they do and why, however, the prudent may not *really* know. In the *Republic* we find that "... according to the way [prudence] is turned, it becomes useful and helpful or, again, useless and harmful." (518e3-4) Just after this, Socrates talks about "the men who are *said to be* vicious but wise." (emphasis added) The soul of such men does not have "poor vision"; Socrates comments on "how sharply it distinguishes those things toward which it is turned." (519a ff) But because of what their vision is focussed on, i.e. the realm of becoming, such men cannot truly know and thus cannot be wise.

[3] The former subsequently occurs only at 367a2 and 368a1 in this section of the dialogue, and the latter does not reappear till 371a6.

the nature of liars (see also 365e1-2, 366b1, 376b4), serve ironically to emphasize the fact that Hippias does not present any original ideas in this section, merely assenting to all of the philosopher's propositions. Socrates now asks Hippias if he is saying that liars "... are capable of lying if they should wish to lie or that they are incapable with respect to these things about which they lie?" (366b2-3) This definition of liars, that they must be capable of lying in order to be called liars, seems rather trivial, but we will soon see Socrates transforming it such that liars become *perfectly* capable of lying. At this point, what is interesting about Socrates' statement is the qualification, "*if* they should *wish* to lie." We note that in the immediately following discussion the phrase "if _____ wishes to lie" appears four more times. (at 366c13, 366e8, 367a2, and 367a5) It seems appropriate to ask, then, when and why human beings wish to lie. Much lying seems to take place in order to escape the consequences of having done something wrong (which is the main reason children lie). Other lies are engaged in for the purpose of harming someone, whether from anger, hatred, fear, or just gratuitous cruelty. One may also lie in order to obtain certain things, be it a few extra dollars or "grander" things such as great wealth, honour, and political power. What is common to these examples is that they are not only selfish, but what would be commonly regarded as unjust reasons for lying. But there may also be good reasons for lying (e.g. earlier we spoke of divine tales of men's origins as a sort of lie). But for most people, just as for Hippias, to call someone a "liar" is a pejorative term. It is, then, all the more curious when Socrates sums up the preceding analysis as showing that "liars are *the wise* and capable of lying." (366b6; emphasis added) He leaves out all the previous qualifications: that the position is Hippias', that only "some" of the capable and wise are liars, and that liars have these qualities in relation to that which they lie about. The implication seems to be that wise men are liars period.

Socrates now elucidates what he means by one who is "capable" or "has power." He says that "each one is capable who does what he wishes when he wishes." (366c1-2) What and when a person wishes to do something is determined by what he knows, i.e. by what he thinks is in his interest, or *good* for him, to do. This, in turn, would seem to depend on his understanding of what the good (or goods) is (or are) for a human being. But there is more to doing than just rationally knowing the best course of action, and it is one who *does* what he wants that is capable. A person's success in acting would seem to depend also on the capacity of his will, i.e. its ability to overcome opposing desires. Socrates offhandedly seems to rule out temporary incapacitation with his exclusion of those "prevented by sickness or such things...." from acting as they wish. (366c2-3) But in light of the later tacit suggestion that ignorance is a sickness of souls, this qualification may not be as innocent or incidental as it seems. Socrates proceeds to give an apparently innocuous example of the type of person he means by the capable: "... I simply mean someone who is in the situation you are in with regard to the power of writing my name whenever you wish--that is what I mean." (366c3 ff.) Hippias agrees that such a one is capable and the discussion continues. But before we follow it, this example merits some thought. The type of power that Socrates is describing here appears to be a meagre one--Hippias' ability to write the philosopher's name whenever he wishes. Why and when would Hippias write Socrates' name? Perhaps he would in a letter or a lawsuit, or in a work of literature, something which Hippias did not do at all to the best of our knowledge. But there were others who knew Socrates who did, namely Aristophanes, Xenophon, and especially Plato. The power involved in writing Socrates' name has suddenly taken quantum leaps; and the example takes on a reflexive quality. We are reminded of the dialogue itself, which is a creation of a man called Plato, and of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, whose author wrote such

names as "Achilles" and "Odysseus."[4] In Plato's seventh letter he says that what he writes are actually the works of a Socrates made young and beautiful. The Socrates we are seeing, then, may be different in important ways from the historical one. And Achilles and Odysseus, the one a demi-god and the other a man involved in fantastical experiences with gods and monsters, are obviously more Homer's creations than real men. But the fact that these stories are not historically true, or are more fiction than fact, has little to do with the truth they convey on a deeper level. For the task of a philosopher and/or good poet would seem to be to pierce to the core of that which *is*, and to reveal these hidden vistas to others, or at least to those who have the ability and inclination to understand such things.

Socrates now turns to specific areas of expertise in which a person could either lie or tell the truth. The first concerns the art of calculation (λογιστικησ). He asks Hippias whether he is "not experienced in calculations and in the art of calculating?" (366c8-9) Hippias affirms emphatically that he is. As an apparent test of his facility and as an example of the art, Socrates asks the sophist whether he would not be able to say "the truth" about the product of 3 x 700 "most swiftly of all and most precisely, if [he] wished?" (366c12 ff.)[5] When Hippias says that he of course can, Socrates asks whether the reason is because he is also "most capable" and "wisest" concerning these things. Hippias has no problem agreeing, apparently having forgotten that liars have just been defined as "the wise and capable of lying." He also boastfully agrees with Socrates' suggestion that possessing these attributes makes him "best" in the same matters.[6] Socrates seems to have established an example of a perfect practitioner of an

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[4] We are also reminded of the fact that Socrates never wrote.

[5] One wonders if there is any significance to this particular choice of numbers. We do note that the letter for three in Greek is ψ, which is also the first letter in ψευδοσ, or the lie.

[6] We may have a definition here of who the best really are in the different areas in which human beings may have expertise. The same criteria may apply more generally to human beings, i.e. that those most capable and wisest in "human affairs" are the best human beings. If we can determine what exactly

art, in this instance, λογιστικης. Such a one can best tell the truth about the particular things that fall into his field of expertise, and, as Socrates will now show, is also most capable of lying about these same things. As Socrates directs attention to the subject of lying, he encourages Hippias to answer just as he did previously, "in a well-born and magnificent way." Two questions follow about whether the one capable of lying about 3 x 700 is Hippias himself, i.e. the "wise man," or the "ignorant" one. In them, Socrates stresses the ability of the wise man to lie "precisely" and consistently "if [he] wishes to lie"; whereas the ignorant man is described as "involuntarily speaking the truth many times if he should chance upon it through not knowing...." (366e4 ff.) The possibility of such a thing happening in *this* case seems rather remote, as there is, strictly speaking, an infinitude of possible wrong answers to this question and only one correct answer (being the farthest extreme from "yes-or-no" questions in which an ignorant person has an equal chance of telling the truth as of lying). This might imply that there are situations where one who does not know the truth could lie effectively, except for the fact that for lies to be convincing, they usually have to be plausible. Someone would pretty easily be caught lying, for example, if he said that the answer to 3 x 700 was 8. What may be misleading about this example with respect to certain "truths" about human life, however, is the implication that there is only one correct answer to any particular question. The question of what the best life is for a human being, for example, may have as many different answers as there are distinct types of human beings.

Hippias seems to have no problem agreeing with everything Socrates has just said. (see 367a7) We note that up to this point in the argument, lying has been spoken in terms of capacity (as a mode of action which is available to the one who knows, "if he

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human affairs are, if it can be sufficiently limited in this way, we will have criteria by which to judge who the better man is of Odysseus and Achilles.

wishes"). That now changes as Socrates engages in a rather bizarre bit of questioning about "numbers."[7] He asks Hippias, "Is the liar then a liar only about other things but not about number, and would he not lie in counting ['numbering']?" (367a8-9) That is, there is no qualification of such a one being capable of lying in this instance or doing so "*if* he wishes to." Hippias, curiously, answers the question emphatically in the affirmative with his second oath of the dialogue. His previous oath occurred when he asserted that liars were only too prudent. (365d8) Our interpretation there--that Hippias seems to have had first-hand experience of this type of "prudence"--seems borne out by his vehemence here. Numbers and counting, after all, play their largest role for most people with respect to money.[8] And we have already seen (from the *Greater Hippias*) that Hippias has something of an obsession with money. Given Hippias' claim that he is wisest and most capable and best at calculation, it might seem odd to suggest that he has likely been the victim of those who lie about counting. One would then be inclined to conclude that Hippias is (voluntarily) lying about his expertise here, except for the fact of his monstrous conceit. If the conversation portrayed in this dialogue is any indication, he could very well believe that he is an expert calculator even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Perhaps, on the other hand, he was bilked prior to his gaining

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[7] To the Greeks αριθμων is not the same as λογιστικησ (calculation). Bloom, in his notes to the *Republic*, says that "In Greek mathematics the study of numbers and their attributes (*arithmetike*) is distinguished from that of calculation (*logistike*), which involves operations with numbers (addition, subtraction, etc.)." p. 465.
Julia Annas, using examples from the *Gorgias* and *Philebus*, feels that "Plato is committed to a distinction between theoretical arithmetike and theoretical logistike: knowing how to count numbers, knowing what numbers are, is taken to be different from knowing the various relationships numbers stand in, the ways in which they are related by addition, multiplication, and so on." According to Annas, the *Lesser Hippias* is one of a number of dialogues in which arithmetike and logistike are conflated. Annas, in *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books M & N*, transl. by Annas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) pp. 5-7. This interpretation seems correct in terms of Hippias' reaction to this example. Socrates seems to have brought "number" and "numbering" to the fore in order to get Hippias to agree that experts in the arts being considered *are* both liars and truth-tellers.

[8] In ancient Greece, which did not have a convenient numeric system like the Arabic one, the ordinary citizen was at much greater risk of being the victim of those who lie about numbers in this fashion than in our society. It required a great deal of skill to be proficient at calculation, which made a good calculator (potentially at least) a good embezzler.

such expertise. Socrates, at any rate, seems to have tapped a sensitive vein in Hippias with this question, and purposely so it seems. His next question to the sophist is even more forthright about the existence of certain human beings who are liars: "Should we then regard this too as established ... that a certain sort of human being *is* a liar about calculation and number?" (367a11-12; emphasis added) We note that this has not, in fact, been established by argument. But Hippias assents to the question without noticing that small fact, his previous agreement that liars lie about numbers apparently colouring his response here.

Socrates now directs the discussion back to those who are capable of lying. Asking the identity of the person who lies about calculation and number, he proceeds to give an ostensible answer to this question, but in the form of another question, once again referring to capacity or power as that which determines who the liar is. (367b2 ff.) He then returns specifically to calculation and asks Hippias whether he has not been revealed as one "most capable" of lying and of telling the truth about calculations. (367b7 ff.) We note that Hippias seems to have some difficulty answering the lying part affirmatively. (see 367b9 & 367c3) He doubtless has some awareness that the discussion is running counter to the view he is publicly committed to. Socrates concludes that the "same man" is "most capable" of doing both[9]; adding, "And this is the one who is *good at these things*, the expert calculator." (367c4-6; emphasis added) Once again, we have the conflation of "the liar" with the one who is *capable* of lying. Socrates' next question is different; he wants to know "Who ... *becomes* a liar about calculation other than the *one who is good*?" (367c8 ff.; emphasis added) Instead of referring to capacity alone (he adds that this one is "also capable ... and truthful as well"). Socrates is now referring to one who actually lies. It is interesting that in this context we find the philosopher employing an equivocal, apparently "sophistical" use

[9] Leake has mistakenly translated 367c4-5 as a question. see Loeb, p.442 & Burnet, p. 366e.

of 'good.' Socrates seems to refer indiscriminately to the one who is good simply, i.e. *the* good human being, and to he who is "good" at some particular thing.[10] But why should the former be said to be the one who becomes a liar about calculation? The position is certainly at odds with Hippias' view that liars do evil, something which he does not notice. But the reference to the good one simply also raises the issue of when it is good for a calculator to lie about his art. The art of calculation itself does not seem to provide any guidance in this regard. Socrates' next question to Hippias refers even more clearly to one who lies, but this time the referent seems to be the expert calculator: "Do you see, then, that the same one *is* a liar and truthful about these things, and the truthful is no better than the liar?" (367c12 ff.) Hippias apparently does, which is more evidence of his inability to follow an argument; for Socrates has nowhere shown *why* the expert calculator would both lie and tell the truth about calculations. The practice of the art itself does not seem to require it.

Socrates wonders if Hippias would like to consider the same matters in another area, asking the sophist if he is "not also experienced in geometry?" (367d5 ff.) The first reference, in this case, is to the one who is "most capable." Socrates establishes that the one with the most power to lie and to tell the truth "about geometrical figures" is the same person. But here too we find an equivocal use of the good. Socrates asks, "Is anyone else *good in these things* other than this one?" (367d9 ff.; emphasis added) Hippias thinks not and Socrates appears to agree with him at first, referring to the "good and wise geometer" who is "most capable" in these matters. But for some reason he does not leave it at that, asking, "And if anyone else *could be a liar* about geometrical figures, it would be he, the *one who is good*?" (367e2 ff.; emphasis added) Socrates seems to be subtly distinguishing one who is "good at geometry" from the one who is "good simply" and yet lies about geometrical things, and inviting us to sort out their

[10] ο αγαθοσ as opposed to ο αγαθοσ περι τουτων

relationship. Once again the simply good one seems to be connected with the one who actually lies about this art, as opposed to being "most capable" of doing so; and once again he is also referred to as "capable of lying," although in this instance not as truthful. Socrates adds, instead, that "the *bad one* was incapable of it, so that he would not become a liar who is unable to lie...." (emphasis added) Hippias ironically agrees that "These things are so," apparently not noticing that the "bad one" has just been defined as being incapable of lying. We remember that for him, liars are "worse" human beings. Perhaps he thinks Socrates is referring to the bad geometer in this instance, but this is something we cannot be sure of, and even so, Socrates has not offered any reasons why the good and wise geometer would want to lie. There is no reference to the simply good one in the next example, that of astronomy. (368a4 ff.) In this case, Socrates says that "*if anyone* is a liar" it will be the good astronomer. (emphasis added) It cannot be the "ignorant" one because he is "incapable" of lying. He also says that "In astronomy as well ... the same one *will be* truthful and a liar." (emphasis added) With respect to astronomy, then, there seems to be little question that the practitioner of the art is a liar. As we will soon see, there is some justification for saying this; but Socrates gives no proof of it here, and we note that once again Hippias notices nothing amiss.

The first "proof" concludes with an invitation for Hippias to "consider freely in this way in the case of all the sciences whether matters are anywhere in a condition other than this...." (368b1 ff.) Socrates does not specifically say here that what has been shown is that the same man *is* both truthful and a liar, but he does shortly thereafter, at the end of the little speech he gives here on the nature of Hippias' "wisdom" (see 368e2-6) We have noted that it has not in fact been proven that the

same one *is* a liar and truthful with respect to any of the three[11] sciences discussed so far, but only that the expert would seem the most *capable* of "perfect" lying. There is no disputing Socrates' contention that the experts in these various areas are *capable* of both lying and telling the truth, but there is no need for them actually to lie in the practice of the art. The expert calculator may lie in transactions involving money (embezzle, say), but that is more a case of calculation being used in the "art" of stealing than its being an integral part of the art of calculation. The latter would seem to involve gaining understanding about calculation (about which no calculator would want to lie), and calculation itself is only intelligible in terms of its being directed at calculating correctly, i.e. "truthfully." The case of geometry seems similar. It was used in ancient Greece, as it is now, for such things as measuring land[12] (which is what the term was derived from, since it literally means "earth-measuring"). Geometric deceptions likely occurred, then, in transactions of land. But, once again, these deceptions do not seem to a necessary part of the good geometer's art. The example of astronomy may be somewhat different. Since the traditional religious view was that the heavenly bodies were gods, lying about astronomy (i.e. saying things that accorded with the authorities' views or at least maintaining a judicious silence) may very well have been part of the good astronomer's art, insofar as he wanted to continuing practicing it, that is.[13] Investigating "things in the heavens" could be politically hazardous. The example of Anaxagorus (who is mentioned in the *Greater Hippias*) is a case in point. Anaxagorus, after having lived in Athens for thirty years was charged with impiety for believing that

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[11] Socrates begins the discussion of the astronomer by saying "... let us also investigate the *third* man ...." (367e9; emphasis added) Our note on "numbering" implied that it is to be conflated with calculation. If there is a fourth man, he would be the simply good one.

[12] J. Annas, pp. 21-2.

[13] In this context, we also remember that astronomy (i.e. understanding "solids in motion") can be a metaphor for philosophy.

the sun was a burning stone."[14] He managed to flee, thus saving his life, in dramatic contrast to Socrates who suffered a kind of martyrdom in connection with a similar charge.[15] Maybe the fact that the truly good astronomer is necessarily, then, both a liar and truthful is why Socrates seemed to treat this science somewhat differently, not speaking of the simply good one as the liar in this instance. But the case of astronomy does not resolve the general problem that the sciences, themselves, do not provide any guidance as to when lying ought to take place, if at all.

As the examples discussed above remind us, one could lie about calculation and geometry for monetary gain. If the motivation for this was greed, the decision to lie would not be a good one (although to the human being who thought money was the best thing in life it might appear so[16]). But if a calculator lied about numbers to a thief, for example, one may regard his action as something good. The implication of Hippias' aversion to liars, that one should never lie about these things, is clearly an insufficient guide to action; there may be many instances when lying would be the good thing to do. Socrates' references to the simply good one as the liar may imply that lying is a much larger part of the good life than it is commonly recognized to be. But how does one determine what the good reasons are for lying? The assumption that greed is a bad reason for lying is based on a particular conception of "the good". Whether it is truly bad depends on what the good really is for human beings. But ascertaining this requires a most comprehensive knowledge. One must know such things as the nature (or natures) of the human soul, whether it is something static or changing, what the proper relationship between human beings is, the place of man in the universe, and so forth. This type of knowledge would seem worthy of the name "wisdom," as opposed to the

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[14] Apparently religious concerns were not the sole motivation for the charge; Anaxagorus was a close friend of Pericles', who was the indirect target of the prosecution.

[15] See *Apology*, 18b, 23d, 36b-38b, 38d-e.

[16] As noted, presuming a person is not self-destructive, he would wish to lie when he it is in his interest to do so, i.e. when believes it is *good* for him.

knowledge possessed by the best calculators and geometers. Such a wise one would presumably have no difficulty determining if and when he should lie. It seems unlikely, however, that there are any human beings who completely possess this type of wisdom. But insofar as one wants to do what is best for oneself, the pursuit of such wisdom seems to be a necessity, and such a pursuit could even be good in itself as it were. In this light, it is interesting that the next use of "good" in the dialogue (after the reference to the good astronomer), occurs in Socrates' description of his most essential attribute. He says:

> Do you see, Hippias, that I speak the truth, when I say that I am indefatigable in questioning the wise? And I run the risk of having only this *one good thing*; all else that I have being of little account. For as to the actual condition of things I am baffled, and I do not know how they stand.... But I have this *one marvelous good* which preserves me: I am not ashamed to learn, but I inquire and I question and I am very grateful to the one who answers, and I have never deprived anyone of gratitude. (372b1 ff.; emphasis added)

The activity or "art" of the philosopher seems to be precisely that which allows a human being to acquire wisdom (to the extent that his nature allows).[17] The various uses of "good," then, seem to comprise an esoteric teaching about the merits of the philosopher. As we will soon see, the sophist's activities are of a very different character, and his "wisdom" a very dubious quantity, which makes his hubris especially ironic. And given Hippias' extravagant boasts about his abilities, it is fitting

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[17] In the *Republic* calculation, geometry, and astronomy are among the preliminary studies in the education of a philosopher. (521c ff.) What is the "coping stone" of these studies, the highest activity of the philosopher, is the art of dialectics. This is "when a man tries by discussion--by means of argument without the use of any of the senses--to attain to each thing itself that is and doesn't give up before he grasps by intellection itself that which is good itself...." (532a5-8) The one good thing that Socrates says he possesses in the *Lesser Hippias* (see 372b1 ff.) seems to be this very art of dialectics. Later in the *Republic*, Socrates says that those engaged in capturing "the *idea* of the good" must conduct themselves as though in battle. The new heroes of the Greeks are to be philosophers it seems. Their heroic code, though, would not entail the destruction inherent in the Homeric one. In this light, it is interesting that another philosopher writes that "Under peaceful conditions a warlike man sets upon himself." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House Inc., 1966) aphorism 76. For a discussion of this view of the *Iliad* see Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, (Berkeley: University of California Press) pp. 86 & 169.

that Socrates', or perhaps more correctly,[18] Plato's teaching about Socrates' merits should be conveyed in an esoteric fashion.

Hippias would seem to be eminently qualified to judge how matters stand in relation to lying in "all the sciences" because Socrates has heard him boasting that he is "the wisest of all human beings in the greatest number of arts...." (368b1 ff.) But Socrates' catalogue of Hippias' accomplishments, which the sophist evidently offered as proof of his "extensive and enviable wisdom" in the marketplace at Athens, reveals Hippias' blindness about the true worth of the knowledge that he possesses and thus the real rank that he holds among human beings. The fact that Hippias makes no attempt to deny any part of Socrates' account justifies our taking it as a truthful representation of an episode in the sophist's life. As part of the evidence of his claim to comprehensive wisdom, Hippias offered the various adornments of his body, all allegedly products of his own hands. Socrates begins as he says Hippias did, referring to the ring he is wearing, "another signet," implements for caring for his body, his shoes, his overclothes, his tunic, and the belt around his tunic which he said was like (i.e. an imitation of) the costly Persian ones. The latter is said by Socrates to have "... seemed most unusual to all and a display of the greatest wisdom...." The sincerity of Socrates' apparent praise has to be considered in light of the fact that the word meaning "most unusual," ατοπωτατον, can also mean "most absurd" for it literally means "most out-of-place." The entire list of accomplishments would seem one of the most bizarre that have ever been offered as proof of the possessor's "wisdom," although the skills involved are expertises of a sort. But even within a context that accepts Hippias' view about the importance of these things, Socrates' phrasing reveals the inadequacy of Hippias' thought. The mention of Hippias cutting leather, weaving, and plaiting tacitly

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18 As this use of the various "goods" is not something that the silent participants of the dialogue would catch, it is likely intended for a different audience.

points to his dependence on other artisans, and requires him to transfer at least some of the praise for the goods he has produced onto them. To be sure, these physical goods are not all that Hippias based his claim to wisdom on:

> In addition to these things, you said that you came having poems--epic verses, tragedies, dithyrambs--and many speeches of all sorts in prose. And you said that you came with knowledge, distinguished from that of others, concerning the arts of which I have just spoken, and about rhythms, harmoniae, correctness of letters, and very many other things in addition to these.... And further, I forgot your artful device (as it seems) for remembering....

There is no mention in this catalogue of knowledge of philosophy, for of course Hippias is a *sophist* (i.e. a wise man), not a mere lover of wisdom. Although Hippias' obvious pride in his superior "wisdom" reveals that he recognizes differences of rank among human beings, what makes him so ridiculous is that he makes no such distinction among the various things that human beings can know. He is an extreme type of egalitarian polymath, not seeing that there are various categories of human knowledge, categories that merit unequal devotion from human beings who are lovers of wisdom. Thus he offers as evidence of his "wisdom" such disparate things as knowing how to make his own clothes to understanding geometry to being a poet.

After Socrates lists Hippias' "accomplishments," he tells him to consider his own and others' arts and say whether in any of them the truthful person is different from the liar. (368e2 ff.) Socrates says he should do this "in the case of whatever wisdom you wish, or whatever unscrupulous wickedness, or whatever you are pleased to name it." He does not give Hippias any encouragement that he will be successful in his quest, telling him that he "will not find it ... for it does not exist." Hippias is unable at the moment to prove Socrates wrong, though he implies he might come up with an answer if he had more time.[19] (369a4) We have already seen that Socrates' argument that the

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[19] In the *Greater Hippias*, Hippias keeps telling Socrates that he could come up with the answer to the question of what the beautiful is if only he could go away and think about it for a while. (295a4 ff., 297e1-2)

same one *is* a liar and truthful with respect to calculation and geometry is sophistical, although it seems nonetheless valid in a certain way when applied to astronomy. Two other arts that would seem to require a judicious admixture of lying (but in their very practice, as opposed to being a means of their preservation) are medicine and coaching.[20] But most arts and sciences would seem to fall into the former category, i.e. they do not necessitate lying for the practice of the art, and provide no guidance as to when (if ever) lies should be told about them. Of course, human interaction is not limited to the practice of various arts and sciences (as Socrates' reference to "whatever you are pleased to name it" may be seen as reminding us). People also interact, and can potentially lie, in their relationships with their fellow citizens, acquaintances, friends, families and so forth. And in these instances too, as with the arts and sciences, knowing when it is good to lie would seem to ultimately depend on serious thought about justice and goodness, which is not to say that most human beings do not have *some* commonsensical understanding (based on experience) of when lies are justified. Most people realize that lying may sometimes be necessary, and would generally approve of it in certain circumstances. Indeed, a person who only told the truth would have to be regarded as a simpleton; and one who *only* lied (if this is even possible!) would have to be mad. The fact that Hippias seems to have a morality that divides men into good and bad on the basis of truth-telling and lying makes him something of a simpleton. His conception of Achilles as not being a liar, however, may nonetheless have some merit. A powerful man who is used to getting what he wants may not see any need to lie.[21] In this sense, the "better" man is one who has no need of lying. The

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[20] A doctor, for example, may choose to lie about a patient's chance of surviving some dread disease in order not to destroy his ability to fight the illness by crushing all hope. In athletics, winning seems to depend a great deal on spirit and self-confidence, which implies that a good coach will tell someone he has a good chance of winning even if the odds are against him.

[21] See also Leake, p. 302.
Another example of such a human being is Othello.

only problem with this understanding is that absolute power, a "perfect" tyranny, would be required to make lying completely unnecessary. In any case, what may be surprising for many people and what makes the problem of distinguishing "good" from "bad" lying so much more difficult, is the extent to which "lying" or the false pervades human life.

We have already alluded to the role the "false" may play in political life and in literature. Socrates' sophistical arguments are another form of falsehood. Their purpose seems to be to reveal both Hippias' ignorance and the deficiencies of the arts in providing standards of right and wrong. Hippias' claims about himself and his agreements to all of Socrates' arguments are themselves unwilling or involuntary lies. And several of the examples that Socrates provides of Hippias' arts are also illuminating in this regard. Hippias' rings and "Persian" belt betray a desire for adornment or finery on the part of the sophist, an attribute normally associated with women, but which likely reveals as much about the nature of men. This desire seems to be based on the need to enhance whatever merits one's body may possess or even to conceal its flaws, to make more beautiful what is more plain or ugly. It is clearly a form of dissembling. So too is politeness, but no sensible person would call it something bad. When such things are taken into account, it seems that all human beings are "liars" in one way or another.

V. Return to Achilles and Odysseus
(369a5-371e8)

After assuring Hippias that nothing is likely to occur to him even if he had more time to think about the problem, Socrates tests the sophist's famous memory by asking him what the implications of the present argument are. (369a5 ff.) It is a test which Hippias completely fails, unless one thinks that his claim that he does not understand what Socrates is saying is just feigned ignorance in order to buy time. The latter possibility can be discounted, given the apparent ease of his agreements with Socrates' proposition in the first proof that the same man is both a liar and truthful. From all appearances, Hippias (unlike, say, Thrasymachus in the *Republic*) did not need to be dragged through the arguments sweating and blushing; because, having forgotten his initial statements (or not being able to put two and two together), Hippias had no inkling of where things were going to end up. Socrates ironically wonders if the reason Hippias cannot remember the implications of the argument is because he has turned off his "device for remembering," and insinuates that this is because he does not think the present discussion worthy of his attention. (369a8-10) In a sense, nothing is probably farther from the truth than the latter accusation, in that Hippias has not only an actual patron in the audience but many potential patrons and students. It is not likely from of lack of interest, then, that Hippias has forgotten the initial points of the argument, but from weakness in his thought. Socrates, who had just finished saying that he had difficulty remembering Hippias' clever device for remembering as well as "many other things," now says that ***he*** will remind the sophist of the implication of the argument. The form in which Socrates puts his reminder is itself an ironic slight: "*Do you know* that you asserted Achilles was truthful, while Odysseus was a liar and wily?" (369a10-b1; emphasis added) For the largely silent spectators, the nature of Hippias' knowledge

must be becoming increasingly unclear. He responds in the affirmative to the previous question, and Socrates proceeds to review how what has just been argued relates to this initial claim. He asks Hippias the following question: "... *do you perceive* that the same man has come to light as being both truthful and a liar, so that if Odysseus was a liar, he becomes also truthful, and if Achilles was truthful, he becomes also a liar, and these men are not different from one another or opposite but similar?" (369b3-7; emphasis added) We have indeed seen that Hippias has not perceived it otherwise, i.e. he has not seen the sophistical nature of the argument that the same man *is* both a liar and truthful. He is thus in a nice little mess. One can well imagine the effect all of this has on the listeners to the conversation. The fact that Hippias has forgotten his initial position and seems to have argued against it, throws a very dubious light on his "wisdom." It is clear that the sophist has lost at least the first round. The fact that he immediately retaliates with an outburst against the Socratic method (see 369b8 ff.) shows that he is well aware of his loss of standing.

Hippias' criticism of Socrates' method is especially ironic, being directed toward the philosopher's alleged tendency to focus on the "small details" of things and not deal with the whole. (369b8 ff.) We remember, from the *Greater Hippias*, that Hippias is concerned with such grand things as remembering fifty names at once! In the same dialogue, Hippias responded to Socrates' refutation of his views of the beautiful by saying that all Socrates' arguments were mere "scrapings and clippings of speeches" and advised him to leave these behind and strive to create those speeches that are "both beautiful and worth much." (304a5 ff.) It must be a speech of this sort that the sophist now offers to give as a defense of his initial position that "... Homer represented Achilles as better than Odysseus and not a liar, while he represented the latter as treacherous, frequently lying, and worse than Achilles." It is clear that the previous arguments have had little effect in getting Hippias to doubt his belief that, with respect

to Odysseus and Achilles, lying and truth-telling are the decisive criteria in determining who is the better man. If he had seen the dubiousness of this view, a smarter way of preserving his reputation for wisdom would surely have been to focus on reasons other than lying and truthfulness as to why Achilles is better than Odysseus. But Hippias is confident that his speech will redeem his reputation among those listening, since it will be a surer test of "who speaks better." Alas for Hippias, if anyone gives a speech now it is not him but Socrates.

Socrates first responds to Hippias' attack on his method. Again, what he says is ironic; it can be taken both as complementary and as deeply critical of Hippias. (369d1) Socrates contrasts his own behavior with that of the sophist's. He says (in effect) that he may not be as wise as Hippias, but he is smart enough to realize when it is in his interest both to listen carefully to another and to question him thoroughly. Hippias, by his outburst, has just revealed that his concern in conversing is not with understanding things better, but in protecting the views that he already holds, and thereby his reputation for wisdom. Socrates clearly treats learning and understanding as the primary benefits, and explains his eagerness to converse with the wise. (369d8-e3) The motivation of the philosopher, then, is quite different from that of the sophist. Because Hippias wants to be honoured for his wisdom as opposed to desiring it for its own sake, he seems absolutely incapable of realizing that he could be benefitted by someone like Socrates.

Socrates now delivers the finishing blow to Hippias' contention that Achilles is better than Odysseus because he is truthful whereas Odysseus is a liar. Working essentially from the same section of the *Iliad* that Hippias had previously used (the embassy scene in Book IX), Socrates purports to provide evidence that shows *Achilles* lying. Socrates first refers to the pronouncement that Achilles makes midway through his reply to Odysseus (the beginning of which contains the lines quoted earlier by

Hippias), that he will leave the very next day for "rich-soiled Phthia." (370b3 ff.) He augments this by referring to similar sentiments that Achilles had expressed in Book I at the beginning of his quarrel with Agammenon. According to Socrates, although Achilles says these things "... nowhere is he seen to have prepared or tried to drag down the ships to sail back home; rather, he shows quite a well-born contempt of speaking the truth." (370d4-6) We note that in the verses Socrates quotes, Achilles says "*tomorrow* I shall make sacrifice to Zeus and the other gods, I shall load my ships full, I shall drag them down to the water--and you will see, if you wish, if you have the mind for it, in the early morning you will see my ships sailing out over the fish-filled Hellespont...."[1] The reason that Socrates gives, then, for taking this statement as a lie is ridiculous, since Achilles clearly says that he is going to drag his ships to the sea and load them the next day. Earlier, when he told Agamemnon that he was leaving, it was right after Agamemnon threatened to take Achilles' prize or that of one of the other Achaians and seemed to be more of a threat than anything else.[2] Achilles does not repeat it in his next two responses to Agamemnon after the latter tells him he does not care if Achilles leaves, since "There are others with me/ who will do me honour, and above all Zeus of the counsels." (One cannot fail to notice Homer's irony here.) As a threat, the first statement would be a sort of lie, but not an outright one because Agamemnon also recognizes it as such. Socrates, nonetheless, wants Hippias to take these statements as proof that Achilles *is* a liar like Odysseus. And the point is that Hippias makes none of these obvious objections. Socrates goes on to express his bewilderment about not being able to decide which of these two men "... was represented as better by the poet, holding that both are excellent and that it is hard to distinguish which one might be better with regard both to lying and truth and to the rest

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[1] *Iliad*, IX.357-8, emphasis added, transl. from *Homer, The Iliad, A New Prose Translation* by Martin Hammond, (Harmondsworth, Engl.: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987).
[2] *Iliad*, I.106 ff.

of virtue; for in this respect too both are quite similar." (370d6 ff.) Of course, the fact that two men are excellent does not mean that one is not better than the other, a point which Socrates seems to allude to by saying that concerning lying, truth, and the "rest of virtue," they are "both quite similar"; he does not say they are the same. Given the teaching in the dialogue about the respective merits of Achilles and Odysseus (which will become clearer in the analysis to follow), one has to question the sincerity of this bewilderment. Which is to say, we may have here still another example of a voluntary lie by Socrates.

Hippias continues his attack on Socrates' method, attributing the conclusions he has arrived at to Socrates using an ignoble approach. (370e5-6) But he does not cite Socrates' dubious contention that Achilles is in fact lying when he says that he will be leaving Troy. Rather he thinks he has a different objection to the implication that this makes Achilles the same as Odysseus. He says that "where Achilles lies, it is ... not out of design but *involuntarily*, since he was *compelled* on account of the misfortune of the army to stay behind and bring aid, but the lies of Odysseus are voluntary and from design." (370e6-9; emphasis added) Hippias seems to be making a standard distinction that most people would adhere to, that there is a difference between those who lie without scruples and those who lie only unwillingly, either when they are forced to (as a last resort) or when later events cause them to change their mind about previous avowed intentions. As we will soon see, Socrates does not seem to agree with this definition of the "involuntary liar." But apart from such considerations, Hippias' explanation is absurd, since it is precisely because of Achilles that the army is in such dire straits in the first place (which Achilles actually revels in). The sophist thus displays an abysmal ignorance of the *Iliad*. Homer, after all, begins the poem by saying,

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus

> and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians,
> hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls
> of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting
> of dogs, of all birds ....[3]

And he shows Achilles sending his mother, Thetis, to Zeus with the request that he grant his wish that all the Achaians suffer for Agamemnon's offense against him and Zeus' promise to do so (and his subsequent compliance).[4] Socrates chooses to let any such criticisms be, and instead challenges Hippias' view that Achilles' lies are "not out of design." His immediate response to Hippias is very revealing. He accuses the sophist of deceiving him and thus imitating Odysseus! (370e10-11) Why does Socrates not say that Hippias is imitating Achilles? Does he not, in fact, believe that Achilles is a "knowing liar" like Odysseus? If this is the case, Hippias would, ironically, be imitating Achilles more than Odysseus. Poor Hippias seems flabbergasted by Socrates' accusation and justly wants an explanation.

Socrates now paints a scenario that seems to leave no doubt that Achilles was the most conniving character of all the Homeric heroes, even more so than Odysseus. (see 371a3 ff.) We note that Socrates' language in this section takes on a most urgent quality, with many rhetorical flourishes. After quoting the appropriate lines in Homer, Socrates asks Hippias whether

> ... the son of Thetis, who was educated by the most wise Cheiron, could have been so forgetful as to affirm to Odysseus that he would sail away but to Ajax that he would remain, when just a little before he had railed against imposters with the most extreme abuse; do you think he was not a designing plotter who believed Odysseus was someone of primitive simplicity whom he could get the better of precisely by such artful contriving and lying? (371d1-7)

Although he has accepted Socrates' contention that Achilles lies, Hippias cannot accept the view that he is a "designing plotter" who knowingly plans and effects his falsehoods. But whereas before he said that Achilles was an involuntary liar, he now

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[3] *Iliad*, I.1-5.
[4] *Iliad*, I.393-530.

says that "... it was his guilelessness that led [Achilles] to say different things...." (371d8-e2) Socrates' response to this is the very last mention of either Homer or his two protagonists in the dialogue. What he says is thus all the more bizarre. He has apparently been won over by this explanation of Hippias' and says, "Then it looks as if Odysseus is, after all, better than Achilles." (371e5) This must have been the last thing Hippias expected to hear! Given Socrates' spirited defense of the notion that Achilles is a knowing liar, this seems a surprisingly easy capitulation. Has Socrates really been convinced by Hippias, or is this not more decisive evidence that the arguments he was presenting were not sincere, but "sophistical"? They certainly will not bear close scrutiny. For example, while it *is* unlikely that Achilles forgot what he said to Odysseus, he could merely have changed his mind by the time he speaks to Ajax; that is, he may be vacillating. This seems to be borne out by what Achilles says to the third member of the embassy, Phoinix, something that Socrates has so conveniently omitted and Hippias fails to notice (or "remember"). Phoinix, an old man, who had been given refuge, wealth, and political power by Achilles' father Peleus years before, is like a second father to Achilles. He speaks after Odysseus, and in response to his long entreaty to return to the battle, Achilles tells him to stay with him the night and that "... [they] shall decide tomorrow, as dawn shows,/ whether to go back home again or else to remain here."[5] This position occupies the middle ground between what Achilles says to Odysseus, that he shall leave the next day, and what he says to Ajax, that he will not fight till Hector battles his way to the ships of the Achaians. In the *Iliad*, then, we seem to see a progressive softening of Achilles' position and not *outright* contradiction. But while this may clear Achilles of the "charge" of being a knowing liar, it does not put him in a very good light. The fact that he seems so easily swayed implies that he does not have a clear idea of what he is doing, that he "vacillates" about these things.

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[5] *Iliad*, IX.617-19.

When one considers Homer's representation of Achilles throughout the *Iliad*, the picture that emerges is of a hero who is largely ruled by his passions. The conflict that arises in Book I seems to result from the tension between Agamemnon's political preeminence and Achilles' obvious superiority as the best warrior among the Achaians. When Agamemnon threatens to take either Achilles' prize or Aias' or Odysseus' in recompense for the one he has to give up, Achilles is enraged and threatens to leave. As many critics have pointed out, his anger at this point would seem to be justified by the "heroic code" which these men strove to follow.[6] But it still seems to betray political imprudence on his part. The contrast with Odysseus' behavior in the Book II is interesting. When Agamemnon's attempt to test the Achaians has had a horrific result--they run to their ships and prepare to leave Troy--it is Odysseus (on the urging of Athene) who saves the day. He, whom Homer calls "the equal of Zeus in counsel"[7] (169), speaks with "soft words" to the other kings and leaders, reproaching their fear and explaining Agamemnon's ruse to them. With common men who are shouting he employs both words and his staff to bring them back to the assembly. When Thersites, an ugly lame person, wont to argue with the kings and hated most of all by Achilleus and Odysseus, proceeds to berate Agamemnon, Odysseus insults him and beats him into quietude. Odysseus, then, both recognizes Agamemnon's "official" preeminence and knows how to rule men. The force of Achilles' anger can be guaged by his refusal to be appeased by Agamemnon's offer of recompense in the embassy scene. What Agamemnon offers him should more than repay for his wounded honour, but Achilles remains unmoved.[8] It is only when his dearest friend Patroklus is killed by Hektor, after having begged Achilles to let him attempt to drive the Trojans back, that he

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[6] See Schein, p. 100; Lattimore, "Introduction" to the *Iliad*, p. 47; & Hammond, "Introduction" to the *Illiad*, p. 18.
[7] *Iliad*, II.169.
[8] See also Lattimore, pp. 47-8 & Hammond, p. 18.

reenters the fighting. It is the sorrow of this death and the desire for revenge on Hektor that finally supercedes Achilles' anger toward Agamemnon. He says to his mother that the "... the spirit within does not drive me/ to go on living and be among men, except on condition/ that Hektor first be beaten down under my spear, lose his life/ and pay the price for stripping Patroklos."[9] We see, then, that one strong emotion has been replaced by other strong emotions. Once Achilles decides to go into battle, that is all he can think about. He wants neither Agamemnon's gifts nor thinks the army should waste time eating before they fight.[10] He fails to realize that his own strong passion is not shared by the rest of the men. Due to Odysseus' intervention, however, the army does eat; and Achilles' own nourishment is taken care of by the gods. One of the first warriors that Achilles encounters in the subsequent fighting is Aineas, who is saved from death by the gods. During this encounter, Homer directly criticizes Achilles, when he thinks the shield that Hephaistos has forged for him will not hold against a spear cast by Aineas:

> The son of Peleus with his heavy hand hand held the shield away
> from him, in fright, since he thought the far-shadowing spear
> of great-hearted Aineias would lightly be driven through it.
> *Fool*, and the heart and spirit in him could not understand
> how the glorious gifts of the gods are not easily broken.[11]

Given Achilles' behavior in the *Iliad* and what it implies about his understanding of both the gods and man, the poet may think him foolish in more ways than this. Achilles had no conception that his request of Zeus could be fulfilled in such a horrific manner, that "The ways of Zeus are as wise as they are crooked."[12] Later he seems to come to some understanding of this when he says that "Zeus does not bring to accomplishment

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[9] *Iliad*, XVIII.90-3.
[10] *Iliad*, XIX.146-54 & 199-214.
[11] *Iliad*, XX. 261-5, emphasis added.
[12] Jacob Klein, "The Problem and the Art of Writing" in *The Lectures and Essays of Jacob Klein*, ed. by Robert Williamson & E. Zuckerman, (Annapolis, Maryland: St. John's College Press, 1985), pp. 149-50.

all thoughts in men's minds."[13] Homer's representation of Achilles, then, seems to fit the later classical understanding of the tragic hero, one who due to certain flaws in his character causes and undergoes great suffering. While such a figure may be awe-inspiring, he cannot, in truth, be considered a truly superior human being.

Given the weakness of the arguments contending that Achilles is a knowing liar and the other indications (mentioned above) that Socrates does not really hold this position, Socrates is himself engaging in some Odyssean-like behavior in this section. The question is why. Part of the purpose of the first proof, whose apparent conclusion was that the same man is a liar and truthful, seemed to be to show the inadequacy of Hippias' assertion that Achilles is better than Odysseus because he is truthful while Odysseus is a liar. But the implications of this conclusion, that Odysseus is also truthful and Achilles is also a liar, only prove that Achilles is the same as Odysseus. If Socrates' wants to reveal Hippias' ignorance, it would be even more effective if he could show that Odysseus is the better man. (We remember that Socrates' question at the beginning of the dialogue was which is the better man.) Socrates explains his interpretation of Hippias' statement at 371d8-e4, that Odysseus is better than Achilles, by asking him whether "those who lie voluntarily [have not] just now come to light as better than those doing so involuntarily?" (371e7-8) Socrates' mock attempt to defend Achilles as a knowing liar may have been actually intended, then, to reveal (with Hippias' unwitting complicity) the exact opposite: that Achilles is an "involuntary liar." The same man may still be both a liar and truthful, or capable of such, but only as a voluntary liar and truth-teller. Yet if this was Socrates' intention, why was he not satisfied when Hippias apparently admitted as much at 370e6-9, in response to Socrates' first set of examples? Perhaps this definition of the involuntary liar is inadequate. Hippias seemed to be saying that when circumstances "force" a man to say

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[13] *Iliad*, XIX. 328.

what is (or turns out to be) false, this is involuntary lying. In fact, there is no evidence that Odysseus lies except as a last resort. *Hippias'* distinction, then, between the voluntary and involuntary liar would seem to be an irrelevant one. But when he says that Achilles says "different things" from "guilelessness,"[14] Socrates sees fit to accept this as involuntary lying. (see 371e7-8) The impression one gets is of a person who is not quite aware of the implications of what he is saying and "... speaks out directly whatever he thinks even though he is in the process of changing his mind."[15] It certainly seems an apt description of Achilles' behavior. Involuntary "lying," then, comprises not only falsehoods resulting from ignorance, but unrecognized contradictory and confused statements. The resulting picture of Achilles, which reveals a man who does not have a clear understanding of what he is doing and why he does it, is what actually indicates his inferiority to Odysseus.

All of Hippias' attempts to save the reputation of Achilles--and, more to the point, his own reputation for sound judgments--seem to be based on the position that the good man never wishes to lie. Thus Odysseus, whose lies "are voluntary and from design" (370e8-9) according to Hippias, is a worse man. The underlying premise is the almost child-like belief that lying is *never* justifiable, that it is *always* wrong. Strictly speaking, this is a hopelessly naive point of view, which derives from a very selective recognition of the use of falsehood in human life. When Socrates asks whether the voluntary liars have not "come to light" as better than involuntary ones, Hippias seems to make a last ditch effort to salvage both his reputation and the position that Achilles is better than Odysseus. But before examining that, we have to account for the fact that contrary to what Socrates implies (see 371e7-8), there has been no explicit statement that those who lie voluntarily are better than those who lie involuntarily. In the analysis of the first

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[14] In Greek, ευηθειασ, which also means "goodness of disposition," "singleness of heart," "simplicity," in both good and bad senses of the term, and "silliness."
[15] Leake, *Roots*, p. 292.

proof, what came to light was that the same man is *capable* of both lying and telling the truth (and in some cases, *does* both lie and tell the truth), and this was he who knows, alternatively given epithets such as capable, wise, and good. (365d7 ff.) Contrasted with this person is the "ignorant one" who tells the truth involuntarily even if wishes to lie. Presumably, exhibiting behavior that would reveal the fact that one is lying or attempting to lie would be included in this type of involuntary truth-telling, which implies that a good liar must have iron-clad self-control. In this case it seems self-evident that the ignorant person is worse than the one who knows. What must be noted, however, is that this is a comparison between two people who both wish to lie, whereas what Socrates refers to here is a comparison between a person who wishes to lie and is successful in doing so (the voluntary liar) and one who wishes to tell the truth but is unsuccessful in doing so (the involuntary liar). In the latter case, it seems preposterous to categorically say that one who behaves in the first manner is always better than one who behaves in the second. One must know the reasons *why* these behaviors are engaged in. This requires careful and comprehensive consideration of the different kinds of voluntary and involuntary lies, and their uses.

Successful voluntary lying can be divided into two categories: lying for good reasons and lying for bad. As was discussed earlier, knowing when it is good to lie is ultimately a philosophical problem of the highest order, although we seem to have some tacit understanding (based on experience) of what are the good lies and what the bad. Such understanding can obviously be augmented by reflecting on such matters. For instance, some examples of lies told for good reasons would be Odysseus' response to the Cyclops when asked what his name was, his silence about Skylla to his crew, and his telling Dolon, the Trojan spy whom he and Diomedes caught that he need not fear

for his life.[16] And some of the other category are: Iago's planting the seeds of jealousy in Othello, the Macbeths' feigned cheerfulness and hospitality towards Duncan, and Goneril's and Regan's protestations of love toward their father. In the first set of examples, Odysseus has to deal with a creature that is bent on destroying human beings, and with men whose fears (if told the truth) would likely mean the destruction of his entire crew and himself, and with a wartime enemy who can provide potentially useful information. Some justifiable occasions for lying, then, are against one's enemies and to get one's subordinates to act for the greater good. There are any number of other apparently good reasons for lying or doing what is false: to save another's feelings, to instill self-confidence in an athlete or student, to keep what is private private, to ease social frictions (by concealing negative judgments of people one must interact with), to heal, to do what is just in an unjust regime, and so forth. Some of these reasons for lying are based on a desire not to hurt another person, others on a desire to benefit another, and still others on doing the "right thing." In the second case, lies are told against innocent men for evil purposes, i.e. to satisfy an unjustified hatred, to set up a murder, and as flattery designed to gain wealth and political power. In general, lying is regarded as bad when done for unjust purposes.

Involuntary lying, in contrast, does not seem so easily divisible. Obviously one cannot differentiate between doing it for good reasons as opposed to bad, since the person engaging in such activity is either unaware of doing it or is unable to prevent it. In this context, we should recall that in the first proof it was said that the liar is both capable and wise. The very lack of either one or both of these qualities implies that the involuntary liar cannot be altogether good, even though his "lie" may accidentally have good consequences, e.g. a person may unwittingly foil a robbery attempt by

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[16] *Odyssey*, IX. 360 ff., XII. 154 ff., transl. by Richmond Lattimore, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965). All subsequent quotations will be from the same translation.
Iliad, X. 382 ff.

unknowingly giving false information to thieves. There may, however, be better and worse examples of involuntary lies. Involuntary lying per se seems sufficiently described as saying or doing something false despite not wishing to. While it may be unusual, it is possible that the person engaging in such behavior may be aware of doing so or, more likely, having done so. In this case the important thing would be the inability (lack of power) in accomplishing what one desires to do. If one can label different types of involuntary lies, this would seem to be due to the various *causes* for it. In Achilles' case, saying (and doing) contradictory things seems to be the result of his pride and his passionate nature and perhaps a concomitant lack of recognition of the need for forethought in being truthful (i.e. to think through the various paths open to him and their respective consequences before acting). His impulsive words and actions suggest a human being who does not seem to see any need for deception in human life. As noted, this may be partly explained by "... his perception of his great strength as unopposed by forces beyond his control."[17] That is, the heroic man has no need to lie--not out of fear, nor to achieve his ends--his veracity is evidence of his superior power. Fear is another cause of a kind of involuntary lying.[18] One may also lie involuntarily from ignorance, which could be of the type mentioned above that leads to contradictory statements, or ignorance of how things really are. The latter seems to be Hippias' condition. He is profoundly unaware of the true nature of his capabilities and thus his speeches are filled with involuntary lies, not only contradictions (statements at odds with each other), but false statements about the nature of things (statements at odds with reality). Yet another cause would be forgetting the truth (which Socrates implies could not have been Achilles' situation in the example above, although he suggests it

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[17] Leake, p. 302.

[18] The categorization of lies arising from these causes as "involuntary" presumes that reason should rightly be obeyed by human beings. When one is overcome by desire and acts contrary to reason, no real choice is involved.

must have happened to Hippias). And for some people, politeness may also be a form of involuntary lie, insofar as they do not recognize that hiding one's true thoughts and feelings in order to facilitate peaceful and friendly relations with others is a form of falsehood.

Given these reasons for involuntary lies, it is obvious that a particular involuntary lie may be better than a voluntary lie done for some evil purpose. But what about human beings who are habitually either voluntary or involuntary liars? This seems to be what Socrates is ultimately getting at. In such cases, it seems clear that the voluntary liar who lies for good reasons is better than any type of involuntary liar. The former category of lying is necessary for man both because life is not perfectly just and because of various weaknesses inherent in human nature. Imagine, for a moment, the type of world in which it would be possible for self-conscious beings to be completely honest. For such a world to exist it would have to be populated by beings that were all-knowing and all-powerful and who would not be subject to any of the "baser" desires that human beings are subject to. One can decide for oneself how truly desirable such a world would be. But in our "imperfect" world, one who is not a voluntary liar is likely to be of little help to himself or to others.[19] As said before, the *best* kind of voluntary liar would have to be one with perfect wisdom and a perfect kind of power called self-control. But this would be an "ideal," with many degrees of approximation. Odysseus seems to be somewhere near this ideal, with superior understanding and great self-control. Insofar as these qualities are of more importance than physical strength and conventional beauty/nobility in determining who the better man is, he is clearly better than Achilles. This is not to depreciate Achilles' greatness; compared to most of us, he is an "excellent" human being in many respects. To read his story is to marvel at his powers and nobility. But if one had to choose, whose life would one pick to live--

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[19] See also Leake, p. 304.

Odysseus' or Achilles'? The fact that Achilles suffers so much and causes so much suffering stems from his lack of understanding of the world and from his lack of self-knowledge, and consequently of self-control. But perhaps much nearer to the pinnacle than Odysseus is Socrates.[20] And far, far below Achilles would be Hippias. The voluntary liar who lies for "good reasons," then, is clearly better than the involuntary liar. But what about the voluntary liar who lies for evil reasons, is he "better" than *any* type of involuntary liar? Would a Richard III be better than one such as Hippias? In one sense of the word better, i.e. more capable, yes. But common sense, at least, dictates that such a person is not a "better" human being,[21] precisely because of the very greatness of the evil he perpetrates, which is what makes Socrates' argument in the remainder of the dialogue so bizarre. What "common sense" may not be aware of , however, is that those who do monstrous evils likely had, at one time or another, great potential for good.

At this point in the dialogue, then, we see that the truthful man and the perfect liar are potentially the same, and that Odysseus seems to be such a one, while Achilles seems to be a certain kind of involuntary liar. Recall, the whole conversation started from Socrates' question as to which is the better man. The path to the assertion that Odysseus is the better one has certainly been convoluted. The analysis above implies that Socrates, in proving that the same man is best able to lie and tell the truth, was not so much concerned to establish Achilles a liar as to defend Odysseus as truthful. The effect is to cast aspersions on Achilles' greatness. One suspects that we are to see an analogical comparison between Socrates and Hippias. Socrates is like Odysseus and

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[20] In the "myth of Er" in Book X of the *Republic*, Socrates relates how the soul of Odysseus chose "the life of a private man who minds his own business" for his next sojourn on the earth, having "recovered from love of honor." (X, 620c ff.) Minding his own business was one of Socrates' claims about himself, albeit a paradoxical one.

[21] Of course, if one thinks that virtue is knowledge, the fact that the "evil" voluntary liar chooses to do evil reveals his ignorance about the good things and thus his inferiority. And if one thinks that no one voluntarily chooses to do evil, then there is no such person; he too would have to be thought of as an involuntary liar, and this may be Socrates' deeper teaching.

Hippias like Achilles. Socrates utters numerous voluntary lies in the *Lesser Hippias*, but all for good reasons--in order to reveal Hippias' abysmal ignorance and perhaps to educate some others about some of these things being discussed in the dialogue. Hippias and Achilles are both involuntary liars, albeit from differing causes (as per the analysis above).[22] But, as alluded to previously, when one considers Achilles' behavior in the *Iliad* as a whole, and not just the examples given in the *Lesser Hippias*, he seems to be beset by the same type of involuntary lying that afflicts Hippias. Hippias utters involuntary lies because he does not know the true state of things, and this in turn seems due at least in part to his vanity (which makes him both boastful and obtuse). This condition itself can be seen as an "involuntary lie." In the *Republic*, Socrates says that "'no one ... voluntarily wishes to lie about the most sovereign things to what is most sovereign in himself.'"[23] This turns out to be lies "about the things that are, and to be unlearned," a condition which (according to Socrates) is hated by all. The "lie in speeches," by contrast, is useful, which is why it is not deserving of hatred.[24] The implication is that lies uttered for useless (which, in the final analysis, may include evil) purposes are hateful. Socrates specifies at least three situations when the lie in speech can be useful: "against enemies," "as a preventive, like a drug, for so-called friends when from madness or some folly they attempt to do something bad," and "in the telling of the tales we were just now speaking about--those told because we don't know where the truth about ancient things lies--likening the lie to the truth as best we can."[25] There may also be a fourth reason for lying. It seems that the rulers of the best city are to be chosen from the guardian class on the basis of certain tests devised to see whether

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[22] This is not their only similarity. Like Achilles, Hippias seems to have a special relationship to the beautiful, and both of them enjoy good reputations among the Greeks.
[23] *Rep.*, 382a4 ff.
[24] *Rep.*, 382d6-7.
[25] *Rep.*, 382c6-d3.

they hold fast to the opinion that their own good is identical with that of the city's when faced with "labors, pains, and contests," and "terrors" and "pleasures."[26] Obviously, those being observed in such tests cannot know that they are tests and are thus deceived. We remember that much of Socrates' voluntary lying in the *Lesser Hippias* is designed to publicly test Hippias. Later on in the *Republic*, Socrates asks, "'... won't we class as maimed a soul that hates the willing lie ... but is content to receive the unwilling lie and, when it is caught somewhere being ignorant, isn't vexed but easily accommodates itself, like a swinish beast, to wallowing in lack of learning?'"[27] The "willing" lie that Socrates refers to here seems to be the voluntary lie in speech. His use of the term implies that "lies" in speech that are not willing or voluntary[28] are not properly termed lies. The *true* involuntary lie, then, in the *Lesser Hippias* as well seems to be the soul's ignorance about the true condition of things. Achilles' soul, too, seems to be in such a state. For he is ignorant of the far-reaching consequences of his anger and refusal to fight. It will ultimately mean not only what he anticipates (great suffering for his fellow Achaians) but the death of his most beloved friend, Patroklos. His anger itself seems to be based on his lack of awareness that the world is not characterized by perfect justice--that the ends that befall human beings are often not deserved, exemplified by his having to give up Briseis to Agamemnon.

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[26] *Rep.*, 412b8 ff.
[27] *Rep.*, 535d9 ff.
[28] "Unwilling" (εκουσιον) and "willing" (ακουσιον) here come from the same Greek words translated as voluntary (εκοντεσ) and involuntary (ακοντεσ) in the *Lesser Hippias*. *Republic*, ed. Jowett, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894).

VI. A Turn in the Argument (372a1-373c4)

The fact that the type of involuntary lie just discussed, i.e. ignorance in the soul, seems not only to lead to the "involuntary lie" in speech but involuntary actions that are wrong or unjust (such as Achilles' in the *Iliad*) provides one means of linking the two arguments of the dialogue, as does the fact that honesty is commonly (and rightly) regarded as an essential element of justice. For at this point in the *Lesser Hippias*, the conversation shifts to a consideration of the merits of those who do injustice voluntarily as opposed to involuntarily--a shift inititated by Hippias and sustained by Socrates.

Socrates' question to Hippias, whether "those who lie voluntarily [have not] just now come to light as better than those doing so involuntarily," provokes an outburst from the sophist that seems genuine. This time Hippias does not attack Socrates' method but focusses on his argument. He asks Socrates "how ... those who are voluntarily unjust, who have voluntarily plotted and done evil, [can] be better than those who do so involuntarily, when for the latter there seems to be much forgiveness--when someone unknowingly acts unjustly or lies or does some other evil?" (372a1-5) He refers to the authority of the laws in order to bolster his argument (see 372a5-7), evidence once more of the conventional nature of his opinions. We see even more clearly that Hippias believes lying to be categorically bad, in the sense of morally evil.[1] The example of Odysseus has not shown him that lying is often required in human life to accomplish what is useful and good. Hippias' presentation of an apparently common-sense position regarding the respective merits of voluntary and involuntary evil-doers may, then, be a final attempt to defend the conventional view (first attributed to Eudicus' father, Apemantus) that Achilles is better than Odysseus, which (in turn) is a reflection of conventional notions about what is most meritorious. He certainly

[1] These two words, "bad" and "evil," are denoted by one word in Greek, κακος.

requires a great deal of encouragement (as noted below) to continue the discussion, presumably because he suspects Socrates is being willfully perverse. Curiously, Socrates does not make any attempt explicitly to demonstrate to Hippias the falseness of his position by explaining to him that lying can be useful and good (as he does in the *Republic* or in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*). He seems, instead, to accept the sophist's categorization of lying as unjust and evil and expands the argument in order to prove his present position (about which he later admits he "vacillates") that one who does such things voluntarily is better than one who does them involuntarily. Perhaps Socrates thinks that Hippias is incorrigible, and desires to reveal the sophist's ignorance and impotence by successfully arguing a patently perverse position. Or maybe this step of the argument would have been necessary even if Hippias had agreed by this point in the drama that lying can be useful and good. Perhaps a discussion of involuntary and voluntary lying entails a consideration of good and evil.

As chance would have it, there is another "Socratic" writing wherein are discussed very similar issues to those found in the *Lesser Hippias*. This is the second section of the fourth book of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. A consideration of this work may throw some light on the present turn of events in the *Lesser Hippias*. In this section of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon describes Socrates' education of Euthydemus, a young man categorized by Xenophon as one of "... those who thought they had received the best education, and prided themselves on wisdom."[2] We are reminded right at the outset of Hippias.[3] After several encounters designed to pique Euthydemus' interest about

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[2] Xenophon, *Memorabilia* in *Xenophon, IV*, Loeb Classical Library, transl. by E.C. Marchant, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1979), IV.ii.1. Subsequent references to the *Memorabilia* in this subsection will be noted within the text in parentheses.

[3] Curiously, in section four of the same book of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon recounts a conversation Socrates had with Hippias concerning the nature of justice. Near the beginning of the discussion, when Hippias boasts that he tries to say something new every time he speaks, Socrates asks whether he does this with respect to such questions as how many letters there are in Socrates' name and how it is spelt

Socrates' understanding of things, Socrates engages in private conversation with him. Upon ascertaining that Euthydemus wishes to possess the type of excellence that will allow him to rule well, Socrates implies that knowledge of justice is required in order to do so. Euthydemus is confident that he is just and that he knows the "works" of both justice and injustice. Socrates devises a test of his knowledge, asking him to assign various things into two columns, one for the works of justice, the other for those of injustice. The examples that Socrates chooses are lying, deceit, "doing mischief," and "selling into slavery." (IV.ii.14) Euthydemus assigns them all to injustice. Socrates quickly shows him that when these things are done to enemies they are just. Euthydemus protests that he thought Socrates was asking about proper behavior towards friends. Socrates soon gets him to agree that even toward friends "straightforward dealing is not invariably right." (.18 ff.) Now Socrates asks Euthydemus to consider "deception practised on friends to their *detriment*" (emphasis added); whether in such cases, voluntary or involuntary deception is the more unjust. In the *Memorabilia*, then, after Socrates shows Euthydemus the usefulness of lies, he finds it necessary to continue to the question of whether the voluntary or the involuntary lie is more just in the case of harmful lies. (.19-23) In response to this question, Euthydemus says he lacks the confidence he previously had, but proposes that the former is more unjust. Socrates asks him whether "... there is a doctrine and science of the just, as there is of letters?" (.20 ff.) Once Euthydemus agrees to this, Socrates implies that the voluntary "blunderer" in writing and reading is more "literate" than one who blunders involuntarily because he knows "letters"; similarly, the voluntary "liar and deceiver" is implied to be "more just" than the involuntary one because he knows what is just. It seems that for this to be acceptable, however, the

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and what the answer to two times five is. (IV.iv.7) The similarities of both sections with the *Lesser Hippias* seem more than coincidental.

Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge would have to be true, such that one who knows what is just would *never choose* to be unjust. Socrates now asks Euthydemus what he thinks of someone who constantly contradicts himself, "... who wants to tell the truth, but never sticks to what he says...." (.21) Such a human being is clearly an involuntary liar, and apparently one who does harm to his friends given the context of this part of the discussion, i.e. whether involuntary or voluntary lies are more unjust when told to the detriment of friends. We think of both Achilles and Hippias here. Socrates now defines "slavish" people as "those ignorant of the beautiful and good and just." (.22 ff.) It would seem that those who lie involuntarily are to be identified as such. Hippias, recall, was clearly shown to be ignorant of the beautiful in the *Greater Hippias*.

At this point in the conversation, Euthydemus says he is disheartened by his ignorance about the "things that one is bound to know" and by his ignorance of the means of alleviating this condition. Socrates directs his attention to the words inscribed on the temple at Delphi, "Know thyself." (.23-4) When Euthydemus tells him that he paid no regard to the inscription because he was sure that this was something he already knew, Socrates asks,

> And what do you suppose a man must know to know himself, his own name merely? Or must he consider what sort of a creature he is *for human use* and *get to know his own powers*; just as those who buy horses don't think that they know the beast they want to know until they have considered whether he is docile or stubborn, strong or weak, fast or slow, and generally how he stands in all that makes a useful or a useless horse? (.25 ff.; emphasis added)

We remember, in this connection, Socrates asking Hippias whether he had the power to write Socrates' name. Perhaps there is something important to be gained in ascertaining "what sort of creature" Socrates' is (or at least the Platonic and Xenophontic Socrates). The reference to "human use" implies that in order to ascertain one's own powers one must acquire understanding of the appropriate ends of human life. But as in being the

consummate liar, such understanding seems to be knowledge of a most comprehensive kind. Socrates now asks Euthydemus whether "it [is] not clear too that through self-knowledge men come to much good, and through self-deception to much harm?" He proceeds to explicate the goods that come through the one and the bads that come through the other:

> For those who know themselves, know what things are expedient for themselves and discern their own powers and limitations. And by doing what they understand they get what they want and prosper: by refraining from attempting what they do not understand, they make no mistakes and avoid failure. And consequently through their power of testing other men too, and through their intercourse with others, they get what is good and shun what is bad. Those who do not know and are deceived in their estimate of their own powers, are in the like condition with regard to other men and other human affairs. They know neither what they want, nor what they do, nor those with whom they have intercourse; but mistaken in all these respects, they miss the good and stumble into the bad.... (.26 ff.)

We seem to get here a surprisingly apt description of both Homer's two protagonists[4] and those of this dialogue: Socrates and Hippias. When Euthydemus wants to know at which point self-examination should commence, Socrates asks him if he knows "... what things are good and what are evil." Every answer the young man gives is refuted by Socrates (not altogether convincingly, it should be added), as is his understanding of the nature of the people. At this point, Euthydemus expresses his indignation at his own stupidity and Xenophon tells us "he went away very dejected, disgusted with himself and convinced that he was indeed a slave." (.39) But from this point on, he became inseparable from Socrates, unlike many others who had undergone similar Socratic examinations, and whose reactions Hippias typifies.

This section of the *Memorabilia*, then, deals with the themes of self-knowledge and justice, as in its own way does the *Lesser Hippias*. In order to acquire self-

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[4] This is not to say that Odysseus does not suffer, but the crucial difference between his suffering and Achilles' is that the latter's is self-inflicted. We are reminded that, in the end, it is the condition of a man's soul that is the important thing in life and not the pains that he may have had to endure in living well.

knowledge, which in turn is essential to self-mastery, it is necessary to understand the nature of good and evil. One must *know* what the goods and evils are for human beings in order to know the proper use (or uses) of a human being, and in order to understand and utilize whatever powers one has in the best possible manner. This type of knowledge also provides us with the means of determining who are the better men. Bearing all this in mind may help us better understand the very odd discussion of voluntary and involuntary doers of various "evils" that soon follows in the *Lesser Hippias*.

Socrates' response to Hippias' outburst is the longest speech of the dialogue--ironically--since he asks Hippias towards the end of it not to "speak a long speech" but to answer him as before. Socrates spends a good portion of this speech describing his own nature and behavior. In this respect, it is the very antithesis of the other long speech of the dialogue in which Socrates described Hippias' behavior in the marketplace at Athens. In contrast to Hippias' boasts about himself (which is a common form of dissembling), Socrates is humble, professing ignorance of "the actual condition of things." This claim becomes dubious when the evidence offered for it is considered:

> I find it a sufficent proof of this that when I am together with one of you who are highly reputed for wisdom and to whose wisdom all Greeks bear witness, it is evident that I know nothing; for nothing, so to speak, seems the same to me as it does to you, yet what greater proof of ignorance is there than when someone differs with wise men? (372b5-c2)

One may venture to say that differing with truly wise men would be a pretty good measure of ignorance. But given his earlier ironic remarks about Hippias' wisdom, Socrates obviously does not think Hippias is wise. So, once again, we seem to have an example of a voluntary lie by Socrates. Or, rather, of irony, for it may be such a "lie"

only to Hippias, if the silent others listening to this conversation have any understanding themselves. Socratic irony, then, is speech that is meant to be both true and false, to say different things to different people, depending on their particular nature. As such, Socratic irony (or Plato's representation of it) is a reflection of the Platonic dialogue itself. Strauss says that the dialogue "...says different things to different people--not accidentally, as every writing does, but that it is so contrived as to say different things to different people, or that it is radically ironical."[5] That such speech and such writing is necessary is based on the fact that the truth is not always salutary for everyone. In contrast to the many attributes that Hippias apparently possesses, Socrates stresses that he has one good thing. (see 372b3, 372c2) It is, however, something "marvelous" (θαυμασιον). Socrates' first definition of his good is put in the form of a question to Hippias, "Do you see ... that I speak the truth, when I say that I am indefatigable [λιπαρησ] in questioning the wise?" (372b1-2) One wonders if Socrates is speaking the truth in this instance. He does not seem to be in as much as we see him earnestly questioning not only Hippias but all sorts of unwise human beings in other dialogues. What may save Socrates' statement from being an outright lie, however, is that he does not say he questions *only* the wise; moreover there is his use of the term "indefatigable." At the end of the *Lesser Hippias*, when Hippias says that he disagrees with Socrates' that one who voluntary does injustice would be the good man, Socrates does not pursue the matter any further, merely citing his own vacillation and saying how terrrible it is that "ordinary"[6] men like himself cannot be helped by the "wise" such as Hippias. Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates tells Hippias that if anyone speaks who is better than of "little account," "since I desire to learn *what he is saying*, I question him thoroughly [διαπυνθανομαι] and consider

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[5] Strauss, *City*, pp. 52-3.
[6] This word in Greek, ιδιωτην, also means "private person."

again and compare the things said, so that I may understand." (360d4-8; emphasis added) But those who he considers wise are treated a bit differently: "you will find me being indefatigable [λιπαρη] about the things said by one of that sort, questioning him *so that by understanding I may be benefited in some way*." (369d8-e3; emphasis added) Perhaps, then, there is no Platonic representation of Socrates being "indefatigable" in questioning anyone. Socrates' "good" has two other parts to it: he is "not ashamed to learn," and he is "very grateful to the one who answers," never having "deprived anyone of gratitude." (372c1 ff.) The latter apparently means that he has never claimed what someone else has taught him as his own, but instead praises whoever teaches him something as one who is wise and announces whatever he has learned from the man (or woman, as in the *Symposium* and the *Menexenus*). We never see Socrates praising Hippias in this fashion. What we do see in the *Lesser Hippias* is Socrates, in effect, lamenting Hippias' lack of wisdom to those remaining after his exhibition. But, as discussed above (IV.11-12), Hippias' ignorance was something that Socrates had likely learned from the sophist in his encounter with him depicted in the *Greater Hippias*. It seems, then, that one (and perhaps the only) way in which Socrates learns from others is by observing and analyzing their actions and words when he questions them, as opposed to being told truths by them. We note that these very qualities that Socrates' takes pride in, and justly it would seem, are qualities that Hippias sadly lacks. He could benefit very much from engaging in such activity (perhaps not exactly as Socrates actually does, but as he seems to say he does, i.e. by listening to and learning from the wise), but unfortunately for him, he is oblivious to the fact that he is profoundly in need of this sort of benefaction.

Socrates goes on to speak of his complete disagreement with Hippias' views, still apparently disclaiming his own worth. (372d1 ff.) For him, it seems "... that those who harm human beings, who do injustice, lie, deceive, and go wrong voluntarily

rather than involuntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily." What is really strange is that immediately after saying this, Socrates says that at times he believes the very opposite, presumably meaning he concurs with Hippias' view. Socrates' condition in relation to these ideas, then, seems to be one of "vacillation," which is emphatically attributed to his ignorance. (see 372e1) The reason for Socrates' present conviction is a "seizure," whose cause is the preceding arguments. The word translated as seizure, καταβολη, also means "a periodical attack of illness." The latter meaning makes additional sense in light of what follows. Socrates asks for a favour from Hippias: "... do not begrudge to heal my soul; for be assured you will do me a greater good by giving my soul rest from ignorance than my body from disease." As this disease of the soul seems to be ignorance, Socrates is again attributing his current opinion to his own ignorance. We cannot be simply satisfied with this answer, however, inasmuch as he is pretending to look to Hippias for the cure. Socrates cautions Hippias against attempting to heal him with a long speech, saying that the method followed to this point will be of great benefit to him and will, he thinks, leave Hippias unharmed. Socrates seems to think the personal appeal will not be sufficient and asks for Eudicus' assistance in getting Hippias to continue the discussion; and justly so, one might add, since he was responsible for initiating the conversation. In both instances, its initiation and its continuation, the discussion seems to be due to Eudicus' intervention. But whereas in the first case Socrates gave the appearance that he was reluctant to speak, in the present instance it is Hippias who is clearly reluctant. Socrates, however, seems very concerned that Hippias continue the discussion with him. Besides appealing to Eudicus, he says later that he strongly desires to "investigate" the issue that has just been raised. (373c5-7)

Eudicus' response to Socrates' request, directed at Hippias, is adept, boxing the sophist into a corner. Eudicus says that he does not think that Hippias will require any

request to continue the conversation given his statements at the beginning of their discussion, that "... he would flee the questioning of no man." (373b1-4) He makes it a point of asking Hippias to confirm whether he had said this, with the intent it seems (taking a page out of Socrates' book) of reminding him of how his boastful self-presentation has committed him to answering Socrates' questions. Eudicus acts as if he has been following the discussion closely, which would be in keeping with his claim to take serious interest in philosophy. Hippias responds by once again attacking Socrates' method, but this time imputing bad intentions to him. (see 373b5-6) The complaint seems almost child-like. Socrates protests his innocence, using Hippias' own views as a defense: "Hippias, best of men, it is not voluntarily, at any rate, that I do this--for I would be wise and tricky, according to your argument--but involuntarily, so please forgive me, for you assert that whoever makes trouble involuntarily ought to have forgiveness." (373b7-10) Socrates would be referring to Hippias' earlier agreements with Socrates' argument that liars are the wise. We have seen that whatever difficulty Hippias has had in the argument has indeed been caused voluntarily by Socrates--which, in his own words, makes him wise and tricky. One wonders if Socrates disagrees with Hippias that those who make trouble involuntarily merit forgiveness.[7] His apparent position that those who do wrong voluntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily does not seem to necessitate it. The very fact that the former are "better" may mean that they should be punished more harshly than those who do wrong inadvertently. Socrates' own actions do not fit into any of these categories, if our suspicions are correct that he has had good reasons for what he has done. At this point, Eudicus again intervenes on Socrates' behalf; he is very insistent that the conversation continue. He tells Hippias that he must answer Socrates, both for "our sake" and the

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[7] In Plato's *Apology*, in refuting the charge that he corrupts the youth, Socrates says, "if I corrupt involuntarily, the *law* is not that you bring me in for such involuntary wrongs, but that you take me aside in private to teach and admonish me." (26a; emphasis added)

"sake of your initial statements." (373c1-2) It is this personal intervention of Eudicus' that apparently is the deciding factor in Hippias' decision to continue answering Socrates as before. (see 372c3-4) In Hippias' mind, not acceding to his request would likely mean the sure loss of standing in Eudicus' eyes, not to mention other potential sources of employment. Whatever Hippias' discomfort in continuing the conversation and risking further embarrassment, he has little choice in the matter given his dependence on the good opinions of others for his livelihood.

It is clear, then, that both Socrates and Eudicus are intent on the discussion continuing. Eudicus' interest may be explained by his claim to be a pursuer of philosophy. Following the conversation closely, he is undoubtedly intrigued by Socrates' proposition that those who do wrong voluntarily are better than those doing so involuntarily. He may also be interested in seeing whether the famous sophist can refute such an apparently perverse position. Socrates' reasons for wanting the discussion to continue are not so clear. One may think that he wants to answer Hippias' final objection to the thesis that Odysseus is better than Achilles. As previously noted, however, Socrates could have easily dealt with this objection by explicitly demonstrating to Hippias that lying can be useful and good. Instead, he seems to accept Hippias' opinion about lying, and includes it in the same category as harming human beings, doing injustice, and going wrong (see 372d4-8). Since we have already seen that those who lie for good reasons--which includes Odysseus and Socrates--are not doing what is wrong, evil, or unjust this could be regarded as another "sophistical" move on Socrates' part. He accepts the new direction that the conversation has taken, and proposes to argue that those who do injustice voluntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily. As should be clear by now, this does not necessarily mean that Socrates sincerely holds this position; there is evidence both in his long speech of this section and in the remainder of the dialogue that in advancing this position, he is being

especially ironical. It may, then, merely serve as a means of undertaking a full consideration of the both the false in human life and the implications of being an involuntary liar.[8]

Various things in the presentation of Socrates' position in his long speech imply that his position regarding the respective merits of voluntary and involuntary doers of injustice is an equivocal one. Socrates refers to those who do wrong voluntarily three times. The first time he says it "appears" to him that "... those who harm human beings, who do injustice, lie, deceive, and go wrong voluntarily rather than involuntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily." (372d4 ff.) The second time he says that due to "a sort of seizure ... those who voluntarily go wrong about something *seem* to me to be better than those who do so involuntarily." (emphasis added) And finally, he says that the earlier arguments are responsible for "... making it *appear* at present that those who do each of these things involuntarily are more wretched than those who do so voluntarily." (emphasis added) We note Socrates never says that any of these things *are* the case, but that they have the appearance of being so. Also, "injustice" manages to drop from the picture very quickly. (Socrates does not mention it again until near the very end of the dialogue; see 375d9 ff.) And one wonders how the earlier arguments can even make it "appear" that the involuntary doers of such things are more "wretched" than the voluntary doers, since these examples of wrong-doing were not mentioned prior to Hippias' introduction of them, and since what was explicitly said with respect to lying (as noted) was that the one who successfully lies is better than one who does so unsuccessfully. Even more strange is Socrates' attribution of his position to what may be a strange fit of illness. There

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[8] In our discussion of the *Memorabilia* we saw that a consideration of voluntary and involuntary lying seemed to naturally lead to a discussion of justice and good and evil.

certainly are better ways of convincing others of the rightness of one's position.[9] The first examples of the second proof make it even less clear that Socrates is sincerely arguing this position. What seems likely, however, is that we are going to learn something about justice in the ensuing discussion.

[9] More evidence that Socrates is presenting a deliberately ironical--and in that sense, equivocal--stance is that although he uses βελτιων for "better" in the first two examples, he uses a much more ambiguous term, πονηποτερουσ, for the reverse position in the third. (Βελτιων more precisely than αμεινων--used for "better" in the dialogue till Socrates' first use of βεστιουσ at 371e8--means "better" in the moral sense; see H.W. Smythe, *Greek Grammar*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, p.89). Two meanings of the root of πονηποτερουσ (πονηροσ) are "in a bad state" or "useless" in a general sense, and "wicked" or "villainous" in the moral sphere. A word that seems to capture both meanings less awkwardly than "good-for-nothing" (which Leake uses), and which is used here is "wretched." As Leake says, Hippias undoubtedly thinks Socrates is using the word in the moral sense. But it is not clear that Socrates is using the term the same way, although he seems to want Hippias to think that he is.

VII. Runners, Wrestlers and Good and Evil (373c5-376c6)

Before "investigating" the matter at hand, Socrates says, "I think that we would *most correctly* approach our investigation as follows." (373c7-8; emphasis added) This implies that the examples of the second proof have been very carefully chosen. And this makes it all the more curious that the first set of examples are so far-removed from conventional notions of unjust or evil actions. Socrates refers to such things as running slowly, singing out of tune, limping, steering a ship badly, and missing the target in archery. There is no explicit reference to doing any of these things for any sort of unjust purpose. It is only in the middle of the archery example that we seem to return to doing wrong in the more common-sense notion of the term. We appear to have more evidence, then, that Socrates is not sincerely opposing Hippias' position. It seems prudent, however, to approach our own investigation of the matter with the view that the entire discussion has bearing on the question of the respective merits of the voluntary and involuntary doers of injustice, as well as on the role of lying in human life. The examples consist of a medley of different things: bodily actions and sensations, the use of tools, animals, slaves, the exercise of various arts, and the desired condition of one's own soul. This last example, along with a consideration of the nature of justice, forms the last part of the proof and the conclusion of the dialogue.

To begin, Socrates, with Hippias' agreement, defines what is good and bad with respect to running. (373c7 ff.) The former, both in a race and in running, is "quickness" and the latter "slowness." The one who voluntarily runs slowly is said to be a better runner than one who does so involuntarily. Socrates does not leave the example at that but goes on to ask Hippias whether running is "doing something" and thus "also effecting something." Running badly is now said to be effecting "what is bad

and shameful in a race." Socrates reminds Hippias that running badly means running slowly and then establishes that the runner who voluntarily "[effects] this bad and shameful thing" is good while the one who does so involuntarily is bad and "more wretched" than the good one. Socrates' argument does not cause any difficulty until he talks about doing and effecting something and then defines running badly as effecting "what is bad and shameful *in a race*." (emphasis added) It is difficult to think of running slowly as something shameful per se. In a race, a good runner could choose to run slowly, i.e. not as fast as he could run, for a variety of reasons. He might want to trick his competitors into thinking that he is not a threat and then surprise them at the end. This strategy could be applied to a series of races, e.g. on the racing circuit prior to a prestigious event a good runner might purposely lose several races in order to take the competition by surprise later. Such behavior is a form of deception, one is pretending to be a slow runner. It is not, however, something shameful or unjust or wrong but part and parcel of the art of running. One who was able to do this and also run fast would surely be a better runner than one who could only run slowly. On the other hand, running slowly because one has been bribed or felt lazy would be a different matter. Such a person would be a better *runner* (at least in potential) than one who used all his power yet still ran slowly, but he would be engaging in shameful behavior, and to that extent *not* be a better human being. The same deception, then, running slowly, can be used for either good or ill. Once again deception per se cannot be seen as evil or unjust. Socrates' phrasing, in this example at any rate, allows for the possibility that running slowly can be put to bad use. He asks Hippias whether "the good runner voluntarily [effects] this bad and shameful thing, while the bad one does so involuntarily?" He does not say that the one who voluntarily runs slowly *is* good or better or that the bad one *is* shameful. And in his next statement, he asks whether "... the one who effects what is bad involuntarily [is] more *wretched* than he who does so

voluntarily?" (emphasis added) We have previously noted the ambiguous nature of the adjective being used here. This example, then, does not deal with a person who does what is wrong or unjust, but with a certain skill, i.e. running fast. Socrates' description of the lack of this skill does not seem to merit the name "shameful" (or even "ugly"), yet at the same time, he does say that the person engaging in such behavior involuntarily *is* shameful; which leaves open the possibility that such a one--though being a "bad runner"--could be a better ***human being*** than one who voluntarily runs slowly. The example has also revealed another facet to the role of deception in human life -- it is fairly used in situations where it is part of the accepted strategy of an activity.

Socrates' next example is wrestling. The better wrestler is first defined as one who falls voluntarily as opposed to involuntarily, and falling is then defined as "more wretched and more shameful" than throwing one's competitor. (374a2 ff.) Then the better wrestler is defined as one who "voluntarily effects" the preceding as opposed to involuntarily. Faking the initial stages of a fall could be part of the strategy in wrestling, e.g. to get one's opponent off balance or to make him over-confident and then "go for the kill." Similarly with actually falling if it only meant the loss of points that could be easily recouped. And even if one fall meant the loss of a contest, one might still choose to fall in order to give a misleading account of one's strength in less important matches. Falling in these circumstances would mean that one was a better wrestler than one who fell involuntarily, and although it would not mean that one was doing something shameful or wretched, such behavior would not be necessary if one could throw one's opponent without difficulty. In this instance, then, Socrates is right in saying that it is "*more* wretched ... to fall [than] to throw one's opponent." (emphasis added) Whether it is "more shameful" seems to be a different matter. If one thinks, as Hippias does, that all forms of deception are bad, then yes. But if, as in running, such behavior is part of the strategy of the sport, it would not be. Looking at matters from the opposite angle, if

one did something "illegal" or unjust to throw another this would be more shameful than falling involuntarily. This may give someone the victory if he was not caught doing so, but it would be a hollow victory. Falling involuntarily to one who was a fair and better wrestler cannot be seen as "more shameful," although it is clearly "more wretched" than throwing him. But it might also be something shameful if one had boasted extravagantly that one was going to win before a match. One thinks of Hippias here. As in running slowly, one may also fall voluntarily for bad or ignoble reasons, e.g. a father may have trained his son for many years, sacrificing his own interests in the process, only to have the boy accept a bribe and purposely lose a prestigious event that he has been groomed for. (The example reminds us of the necessity of "moral" training even for an athlete.) In this case, it is clearly more shameful to fall voluntarily. It seems hopelessly inadequate, or naive, then, to say simply that all falling in wrestling is more shameful and more wretched than throwing one's opponent. One must know both why and how such behaviors are engaged in. Once again, though, we cannot argue with Socrates that generally speaking one who falls voluntarily is a better *wrestler* than one who does so involuntarily.

Socrates speaks next about all other uses of the body. (374a13 ff.) The one better in body is able to do both "... what is strong as well as what is weak and what is shameful as well as what is noble ...." He does what is "wretched" concerning the body voluntarily, whereas the "more wretched" one does so involuntarily. In this case, Socrates does not specify what is meant by strong, weak, shameful, and noble. The potential of strong actions being used for shameful or unjust deeds would seem to be much greater than that of weak actions. And one who was strong could also feign weakness for unjust purposes; for example, one could pretend to have some sort of ailment (a limp, say) in order to avoid going to war (assuming that one lived in a minimally decent regime). Once again, then, we cannot equate the one better in body

with the better human being. The important consideration seems to be that both the strong and the weak actions of the body may be utilized for noble or shameful purposes. The fact that Socrates does not identify the strong with the noble and the weak with the shameful leaves this possibility open.

Curiously, after having apparently exhausted the things of the body with the previous example (he prefaced it by asking about "every other use" of the body), Socrates goes on to speak about the gracefulness of the body, the voice, feet, and eyes. The implication seems to be that something about these further examples links them more directly to the soul. Of gracefulness, Socrates asks whether "it [is] not characteristic of the better body to assume voluntarily the shameful and good-for nothing postures, while it is characteristic of the more wretched body to do so involuntarily?" (374b6 ff.) In this context, Socrates makes one of two references in the dialogue to "virtue."[1] He establishes that gracelessness "if voluntary ... is associated with the virtue ... of the body." Gracefulness seems, then, to be a *part* of the body's virtue (as strength would be too). Another very important part would be possessing good health. The fulfillment of this part of the body's virtue is clearly dependent on the nature of the soul inhabiting it, i.e. on its virtue; for one cannot possess really good health (which is not just an absence of sickness) without good habits concerning food, exercise, and so forth, habits which must be put into place by the soul. Gracefulness, similarly, may be related to the type of soul as well as the body that one possesses. The way a human being carries himself and moves, would seem to depend on a variety of factors, some physical, to be sure, such as one's sex and age, but also some "mental," such as one's sense of confidence and self-mastery. The latter may seem an odd consideration with respect to gracefulness, but it plays no small role in human lives. If we hear some piece of news or criticism that is devastating, maintaining control of our

[1] The Greek word is αρετη, and it means the "goodness" or "excellence" of a thing.

physical reactions not only allows us to conceal our feelings (which may be prudent in the presence of strangers and essential in the presence of enemies), but can serve as an important aid in maintaining control of our emotional reactions. This points to the constant interaction between the soul and the body, which is well-acknowledged to be an immensely complicated (not to say, utterly mysterious) subject. The important thing in terms of this dialogue is to recognize the potential usefulness of yet another form of deception in human life. The various factors that affect gracefulness in human beings implies that there may aspects of gracefulness that vary from human being to human being. The bearing of a warrior, for example, is quite different from that of a bride, which is not to say that there are no common elements. We have yet to consider why anyone would choose to be *graceless*. If certain types of human beings are habitually graceless, voluntarily adopting a graceless air could be an important aspect of disguising one's identity. Odysseus, for example, could hardly have been a convincing beggar if had maintained a regal and warlike posture upon his unannounced homecoming. But, once again, there is no guarantee that one who does this will not put it to some evil use, and thus be more wicked than a harmless real beggar, who is involuntarily graceless. Socrates' initial statements to Hippias implied that the true beggar in this case would be more wicked. Nothing that he actually says here, however, need be construed in this fashion. He speaks of what is shameful in relation to the postures of the body, and of the better and more wretched *body*.

There may, however, be certain "postures" of the body that are more shameful for a human being to engage in involuntarily than voluntarily. These are the postures having to do with sex.[2] A human being who engages in sex involuntarily as opposed to

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[2] The word used for shameful in this section is (αισχρον). It is the opposite of (καλον) and also means ugly. In the *Greater Hippias* Socrates says that "presumably everyone would do battle with us and maintain that [sex] is most pleasant but that if someone engages in it, he must do it in such a way that no one see, since it is most *ugly* to be seen." (299a4-7; emphasis added)

voluntarily would have to be seen not only as "more wretched" but also as "morally worse" than one who does so voluntarily. Whereas those who voluntarily engage in sex could still be doing it for unjust or immoral purposes (for money for example), even they seem to be on a different plane, a higher plane, from those who simply have *no* control over how their sexual urges will be satisfied. Into this latter category may fit perverse forms of sexual activity such as a parent sexually abusing his child. One might protest that Socrates' initial position requires one to differentiate between those who do such acts voluntarily and those who do them involuntarily. But this makes us take a closer look at these notions of "voluntary" and "involuntary." Can we truly say that anyone *voluntarily* engages in such activity? Or does not the very doing of such acts clearly indicate that the perpetrator either lacks any conception of what is right and wrong with respect to such activity (which would make the idea of him voluntarily choosing to do what is wrong nonsensical), or lacks the will to prevent himself from doing something that he knows is wrong? We see, then, a way in which Socrates' initial position can be true. Perhaps it is the same with all unjust or evil actions, that if one really understood what the good is for a human being, *and* was capable/powerful, one would never *voluntarily* choose to do evil, something which Socrates says elsewhere.[3] The example of incest points to the divided nature of the human soul. Like Achilles' anger leading to unjust acts, uncontrolled base sexual desires can cause base involuntary behaviors.

Socrates goes on to ask whether the voice that "voluntarily sings out of tune" is better than the one which does so involuntarily? (374c5 ff.) Hippias answers that it is the former, whereupon it is established that the latter is the "more wicked" (μοχθηροτεραν). For the first time, the worse person, i.e. the one who does something bad involuntarily, is described with a different adjective than "wretched"

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[3] *Meno*, 77b6-78b2. Mentioned by Leake, p. 306. Also *Republic*, 589c.

(πονηροσ). The new term used means "villainous" more clearly and emphatically than πονηροσ. At this point, then, Socrates seems to be clearly saying something similar to his initial position, that those who do injustice involuntarily are worse than those who do so voluntarily. But why should "singing out tune" be singled out in this fashion? It seems no more likely to be put to evil use than running slowly. Consider when it might be done. For example, one may voluntarily sing out of tune, even in a "musical," for comic effect. On the other hand, one may do so in a musical in order to ruin the performance from some base motive. Would the latter person be "better" than some poor person who eagerly "entertained" family and friends with a voice that could not hold a tune? It seems not. But singing out of tune may have metaphoric implications. We remember that for the Greeks, poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were sung. Perhaps Socrates is referring to the content of song as well as its melody, and maybe not of song alone but also of speech. Being out of tune in this manner might mean saying things that do not "harmonize" with reality, i.e. are untrue. Given the examples of voluntary and involuntary lying in the dialogue, both Hippias and Socrates seem to "sing out of tune," but the one involuntarily and the other voluntarily (although the labelling of Socrates' speech as singing out of tune is tempered by the fact that it is largely ironic, i.e. both true and false at the same time). Hippias, according to the argument, is then more wicked than Socrates.[4] This may seem to be a rather harsh judgment: that a pathetically egotistical fool like Hippias should be thought downright wicked. But perhaps he causes more harm than at first appears. His ability to compose beautiful speeches seems to give him great power over the many, and perhaps even

[4] Interestingly, Socrates implies something similar in a passage in the *Republic*. In explaining his hesitance to speak about the community of women and children, he says that he "[expects] that it's a *lesser fault* to prove to be an unwilling murderer of someone than a deceiver about fine, good, and just things in laws." (451a ff.; emphasis added) Glaucon replies that Socrates should speak nonetheless as they will free him like a "guiltless" killer even if they "are affected in some *discordant* way by the argument." (emphasis added) Although Socrates concurs that the unwilling murderer is indeed absolved and that "it's probably so in this case too," it is not at all clear that one who commits a "greater fault" can be similarly absolved.

over those like Eudicus who seem interested in philosophy. (see 363a1-4) But because he is in fact ignorant, his words can harm the souls of those who truly aspire to know and who need teachers in order to pursue philosophy. And deep in the background, a question is perhaps being raised as to the merit of Homer as an educator. But still the question remains, is Hippias also more wicked than one who lies voluntarily for evil purposes? This does seem to be what the argument implies. If one thinks that those who lie voluntarily for evil purposes generally do not aim at harming the *souls* of others but at gaining some "good" at the expense of someone else's possessions, or reputation, or life, it may very well be the case that such a one would, in a sense, be less evil than one such as Hippias whose conceits and "fine" words keep enslaved the most precious possession of any human being, i.e. his soul.

The example that follows is quite peculiar in the context, apparently having no connection to the soul. After establishing that Hippias would rather have good things than bad, Socrates asks him whether he would "prefer to possess feet that limp voluntarily or involuntarily?" (374c13 ff.) Hippias chooses the former and Socrates establishes that limping is "wretchedness and gracelessness" of the feet. Since this is the case, it would be very strange for someone to voluntarily maim himself, permanently choosing to limp as it were.[5] It is not clear, however, that a sane person would never do this. In wars it is not an uncommon occurrence for soldiers to "shoot themselves in the foot" in order to be sent home. This would almost always be a cowardly and shameful act. But there may also be good reasons for voluntarily laming

[5] For Aristotle (who refers to the *Lesser Hippias* and this particular example in a discussion of the false in the *Metaphysics*), the fact that the one who limps voluntarily is only *pretending* to do so is why he is better than the one who does so involuntarily, i.e. the one who *is* lame. But if someone actually lamed himself voluntarily, he would "presumably be worse off," than one who does so involuntarily. Aristotle concludes from this that one who lies voluntarily is "morally worse" than one who does so involuntarily. The assumption seems to be that voluntarily lying is a deliberate maiming of one's soul. Aristotle's definition of the "false *man*"--"one who is an adept at and takes pleasure in false accounts [as previously defined] merely for the sake of doing so and of impressing them on others"--shows us why he might think this. This sort of human being is perverse. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. by John Warrington, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1961) pp. 44-45.

oneself. A person may go out in freezing weather without proper footgear, for example, in order to save someone else's life. What the example teaches is that there are more important things in life than possessing a whole and well-functioning body. In certain situations, this may even mean choosing to completely destroy one's body (and the soul's existence in the process).

The next example that Socrates considers is sight. Dull vision is defined as "wretchedness of the eyes." (374d5 ff.) Hippias is asked which he would rather have and, curiously, which he would rather *be with*, "Those with which one voluntarily sees dully and sees incorrectly or those with which one does so involuntarily?" Hippias responds that he would prefer the former. One might have thought that blindness would more appropriately be termed wretchedness of the eyes as opposed to "dull vision." If we look at the metaphoric meaning of seeing, i.e. understanding, the latter use makes more sense (though the former is by no means excluded: some people may well be "blind" to certain truths). According to the Platonic Socrates in the *Republic*, the problem in human understanding is not generally that most people do not see at all, but that what they see are mere images of things and not reality, and that they are looking in the wrong direction. Seeing dully, then, seems to refer to accepting the conventional opinions of things as Hippias does. This makes it all the more ironic that he says it would be preferable to be in the presence of those who voluntarily see dully and thus possess good vision, for he has no idea what this would mean. But, in fact, most human beings would likely not want to be in the presence of those who see clearly, for what we show, or attempt to show, of ourselves to most others is usually a partial and beautiful image, comprised of the positive and the socially appropriate. This is another example of deception in human life, an example that shows the pervasive influence and perhaps even necessity of falsehood in our lives. Not only does it smooth our relationships with each other, but it provides both personal and public ideals to live up

to. As Nietzsche says, "What? A great man? I always see only the actor of his own ideal."[6] And is it really good for a society to broadcast the fact that certain base desires are perfectly normal? To brutally demand and supply the naked truth at all times is too naive and harsh a position, men being men. (This is absolutely not to say that one should not be so harsh with oneself.)

Unlike the previous examples, however, where in order to *pretend* to run slowly, sing out of tune, limp, and so forth, one actually has to *do* the worse activity, this is not true of seeing, both in its actual and metaphoric senses. Since these activities take place in one's soul, no one else need be a party to them, which is not to say that conveying the impression that one "sees" poorly is easily or convincingly done. To voluntarily desire to see poorly for some temporary period would be like choosing to maim the most important part of oneself, i.e. one's soul. But why would anyone want to convey such an appearance? With respect to physical seeing, an example of a situation when someone might act in this way would be if he has witnessed a crime but maintains that he did not see anything unusual from fear of retaliation from the perpetrator. This would be something shameful. A good reason for pretending to see poorly, on the other hand, might be to save someone else from embarrassment (a child who has wet his bed, to pick a safe example, and has tried to hide the evidence). Similarly, pretending not to understand very well may be done for both good and evil reasons. Socrates ironically professes his ignorance throughout the *Lesser Hippias*, as well as in other Platonic dialogues. Clearly, part of his reason for doing so here is to emphasize the difference between the egotistical Hippias and himself, as well as to make Hippias (and others) amenable to conversation. For those who see this, as Eudicus and some of the silent others who are listening to the conversation may, Socrates' irony is transparent. But there may be a more hidden ironic dissembling of his wisdom in the

[6] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, aphorism 97.

dialogue. Socrates is likely not revealing all that he knows about the issues being discussed. As Strauss says, by doing so "... the superior man ... spares the feelings of his inferiors by not displaying his superiority."[7] Another reason for this type of dissembling would be to encourage others to philosophize, not by providing answers, but rather by posing interesting questions[8] (which may well be why Plato wrote dialogues and not treatises). One has no difficulty imagining various kinds of unjust reasons for feigning ignorance. A person may do so in order to hurt someone out of a perverse cruelty, without being blamed, e.g. asking someone how his wife is doing when one knows that she has just left him. Another unjust reason for feigning ignorance would be to do so out of jealousy, e.g. withholding information that would allow someone whom one envies to get some good thing.

Socrates now asks Hippias whether he "[believes] that those of your own things that voluntarily effect what is wretched are better than those that do so involuntarily?" (374d12 ff.) Hippias says yes, given the sort of things that were mentioned. At this point, Socrates concludes that concerning "all things such as ears, nose, mouth, and all the senses," what is to be possessed are those that voluntarily effect the bad. (We note that all the senses are like sight in that they do not actually act poorly, but one may pretend that they do.) Any rational human being, it seems, would prefer the "better" and the "good." These things can be used to their potential, e.g. running fast, or can be temporarily used "badly," e.g. running slowly, or be disguised as what is bad, e.g. seeing poorly. But, beyond this, one may use what is ostensibly "good," e.g. running fast, and what is ostensibly "bad", e.g. running slowly, for good or evil purposes. We have, then, two concepts of what is "bad" (and "good"). There are those things that

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[7] Strauss, *City*, p. 51.

[8] Kierkegaard contrasts "the famous Socratic art of asking questions" with "the alleged Sophistic art of answering questions." *The Concept of Irony*, transl. by Lee Capel, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 70.

Socrates has been giving as examples, such as running slowly, singing out of tune, steering badly, and so forth, that are bad in relation to the proper end of a certain skill or activity. And, then, there is the sense of "bad" in the moral sphere, i.e. what is evil or unjust. The examples that Socrates refers to, then, can be seen as certain potentialities or powers, which can be used to serve a variety of ends, whose "morality" may range from the heinously evil or unjust to the spellbindingly good. What we seem to have been missing so far, however, is any explicit consideration of that which determines what such things will be used for--i.e. the soul--the well-being of which would seem to provide the standard whereby the judgments of good and bad can be made.

This might explain the strange consideration of the souls of horses which soon follows. Before turning to this, however, Socrates considers the example of tools. (374e5 ff.) Hippias agrees that a "partnership" with tools which allow a person to voluntarily do what is bad is better than one with tools which only allow one to involuntarily do so. What is "bad" in this instance is a tool not fulfilling its proper purpose. Although the example seems to point more clearly toward the user, the focus is still on the nature or capacity of the tools and not on that of the human being who is using them. This is emphasized by the specific example of a tool that Socrates gives. He asks which would be better, "a rudder with which one will involuntarily steer badly ... or one with which one will do so voluntarily?" The good rudder provides the human being with the choice of using it either well or badly, but the bad one does not. But whether unjust things will be done with a tool, e.g. steering a client's ship onto rocks or murdering someone with a hammer, depends on the nature of the human being using it. The example of Hippias' "Persian" belt reminds us that tools are also the instruments of certain kinds of deception, i.e. in the production of things that are counterfeit. No matter how good an imitation is, it never has quite the cachet of the original, even if it is

often as useful and may even be as finely crafted. In this respect, "false" things are different from false speech since the latter is often harmful. Yet imitations seem to be fundamentally regarded as something "fake," even if the imitator, like Hippias, acknowledges it as such, and this leads us to suspect that there is something wrong with them. One aspect of this mistrust has to do with the fact that imitations are almost always less expensive than the originals, which accounts for their popularity; they are the next best thing to the real thing, which "everyone" aspires to. In many such cases what are considered to be the "finer" things in life are governed by the taste of the wealthy and those who pander to them, which may be why Hippias has imitated a *Persian* belt, since the king of Persia was fabled for his wealth. These things serve, then, as symbols of a person's financial position in a society, something which is of great importance to many people. But our penchant for original things may also have less ugly motives: human beings genuinely seem to prize creativity, rarity, and antiquity (per se).

Socrates now considers which type of horse's soul it is better to have, one with which someone "... will voluntarily ride badly or involuntarily?" (375a2 ff.) When Hippias chooses the former, Socrates reiterates that this is better and says that with such a horse's soul the "wretched works" appropriate to it would be accomplished voluntarily whereas with the "wretched" soul[9] involuntarily. Socrates does not specify what he means by "riding badly." It may refer to: a horse that cannot be properly controlled (that does not take well to domestication), a very slow horse, or even a horse with a rough gait. There would seem to be both good and bad reasons for voluntarily doing any of these things. For example, one may provoke a horse into bucking in order to frighten off a thief. An evil reason for doing the same thing might be to injure intentionally, or even kill someone standing nearby. Similarly with riding slowly or

[9] Leake's translation of this as "mare" is wrong. see Loeb, 375a7-8.

roughly. But what is common to all these activities is that whatever the horse is doing affects the rider as well. Provoking a horse to be less controllable, for example, could very well harm the rider. We remember that for the Platonic Socrates, the horse is a metaphor for the city. The implication seems to be that the well-being of the ruler is intimately related to that of the city. As implied before, the reference to the horse's *soul* seems designed to point out the lack of focus on the human soul to this point.[10] We should also notice that, although Socrates refers to the works of the horse's soul, the horse is a domesticated animal. Its nature has been shaped to serve *man's* purposes, not that of a horse in the state of nature. The same is true of dogs as well, to which Socrates extends the analysis, but not with the "all other animals" that he includes. (see 375a11) Horses and dogs, then, seem particularly suited as metaphors for things relating to man, and especially so if one thinks that man's existence in cities, i.e. in political groups, necessitates an often uneasy compromise between what is good for the individual and what is good for the state. This tension makes it even more difficult to determine what the purpose of a human being is.

Socrates now turns to the third category of examples, the exercise of various arts by human beings or perhaps one should say, by their souls. His emphasis on the soul is revealed particularly in the first example. Socrates asks whether, "For a human being who is an archer, [it is] better to possess a soul which voluntarily misses the target or one which does so involuntarily?"[11] (375a13-b1) It is established that such a soul is better "for archery." Whatever the metaphoric implications of this example (which would seem to be part of Socrates' intention), a good archer requires not only a soul

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[10] Ψυχη can also be translated as "spirit" (as the Loeb does here), which gives added significance to the example. Good riders prefer spirited horses, even though they are more difficult to break and take more skill to ride. Once again, having great potential for wrong seems to be a necessary condition of having a good nature.

[11] Leake's translation is misleading. αμαρτανω means both "goes wrong" and "misses the target," but it is mentioned only once by Socrates in this sentence.

which is conducive to training but also a body that is suited to this activity. In any case, it is clear once again that voluntarily missing the target could be put to a variety of either good or evil uses. The one who does so involuntarily is termed "more wretched."[12] But just as an archer uses his powers to hit a target at which he aims, so too a human being aims at accomplishing certain ends. When the latter fails, he "misses the mark." The image seems particularly appropriate in a dialogue concerned about the rank order of men. Good archers are those that hit their targets (and only miss when they so desire). Good human beings would seem to require a similar ability. The example of archery also reminds one of the scene in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus reclaims his wife and property. Penelope has proposed that whoever can string Odysseus' bow and shoot an arrow through the handles of twelve axes can have her as his wife. None of the suitors that try can even string the bow, whereupon Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, has it brought to him. He easily accomplishes the deed and says, "Here is a task that has been achieved, without any deception."[13] The words imply that stealth and deception are *not* necessarily and always Odysseus' preferred mode of action. He is not finished with his bow, however, and proceeds to shoot the leader of suitors, Antinoos (a particularly nasty character) through the throat. Ironically, the other suitors think that Odysseus "had not intended/ to kill the man,"[14] that he had involuntarily missed his target. They are quickly apprised of their error, however, and learn that what had seemed to them to be an unfortunate accident was in fact a very well calculated act on the "beggar's" part, an act justified moreover by his true identity.

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[12] As noted above, the verb used here for missing the target, αμαρτανω, also means to "go wrong." Hippias seems to take Socrates' second use of it, that the "soul which involuntarily goes wrong is ... more wretched," in the latter sense, which may be why it is translated this way by both Leake and in the Loeb.

[13] *Odyssey*, XXII.5.

[14] *Odyssey*, XXII.31-2.

The next art considered is medicine. In this case, the soul[15] which voluntarily does what is bad with respect to bodies is said to be "more skilled in medicine," and thus "better *in this art* than one not skilled in medicine." (375b8-12) The notion of better is once again a qualified one; Socrates does not say that the one who voluntarily does what is bad to bodies is better per se. But surely it is not only those skilled in medicine who can voluntarily harm bodies (which is not to deny that they may do so more skillfully and get away with doing so more easily; cf. *Republic* 333e). Perhaps this is why Socrates makes no reference to the one who acts involuntarily in this example. Both the one who is unskilled in medicine and voluntarily does harm and the one who involuntarily does harm would be worse *in medicine* than the doctor who voluntarily harms his patients, but not necessarily worse simply. But neither of them would have the ability to voluntarily heal bodies, i.e. to do what is good with respect to the art. The earlier reference by Socrates to having the soul *healed* of ignorance and being *cured* implies that there is more than one kind of doctor, a doctor of the soul as well as that of the body.[16] (see 373e7 ff.) According to the analogy, this type of physician would not be the only one who could voluntarily harm others' souls; there could be those who do so without knowledge of this unnamed art of "doctoring souls" (less skillfully to be sure). Presumably, harming souls in this manner would be to make them more (or keep them as) ignorant than they were. We see that Hippias seems to be an involuntary doer of such deeds. Both those who voluntarily (without knowledge of the art) and those who involuntarily do what is bad regarding souls would be worse *in this art* than the "soul doctor," and would lack the ability to heal souls. But if unself-conscious ignorance is *the* disease of the human soul, then one who is "better" in this art may be

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[15] Leake's translation here is wrong. It is not "he who willingly...." but the "soul which willingly...." (ουχι η εκουσα).

[16] We find nothing strange in this, having had psychologists and psychiatrists around for over a century. But *their* kind of expertise is not what is being discussed here.

better simply, which may throw some more light on the nature of the knowledge possessed by Socrates. The example of medicine also adds another dimension to our understanding of the false in human life. Earlier we spoke of one type of lying that doctors may have to engage in, at times, for the good of their patients. Another type of lie in medicine is the prescribing of placebos. Sugar pills disguised as drugs have often been helpful in curing people of, presumably pyscho-somatic, ailments that the lack of "medication" did nothing for. The *belief* that these things are going to help seems to be what cures. This reminds us of the power that the mind can have over the body, and that the mysterious relationship between them is a two-way street. It might also explain why human beings with abundant self-confidence achieve more in life than those that are similarly talented but full of doubts and insecurities, though the line between the former and self-delusion can be a fine one, i.e. justified self-confidence (e.g. Socrates) versus unjustified (e.g. Hippias). It seems that in some cases it is not the absolute truth that is conducive to what is good, but positive beliefs. This aspect of human nature may be partly explained by the importance of hope in our lives.

The argument is now applied to the soul that is more proficient in music and all other matters concerning the arts and sciences. (375b14 ff.) Hippias seems to agree less decisively here to Socrates' question whether "... the one [is] better which voluntarily effects evil and shameful things and goes wrong, while the more wretched one does so involuntarily." No doubt he recognizes that the admission carries him perilously close to the opposite of his own announced position. This may not have been the case if Socrates had specified what he meant by evil and shameful things (he cannot provide an all-inclusive list, at any rate, because he is speaking of "everything else connected with the arts and sciences")--presuming that he has in mind those things that are bad in relation to the proper ends of these activities, playing the cithara badly for example. As we have seen throughout this section, such things could be done for just or unjust

reasons. And once again, the one who does them involuntarily is said to be "more wretched." Hippias seems to have no difficulty with the next example, however, which is probably because Socrates provides him more of a context. Hippias agrees that it would be preferable "to own the souls of slaves that voluntarily go wrong and effect evil, rather than those which do so involuntarily, on the ground that they are better *in these matters*." (375c5 ff.; emphasis added) Slaves may be used for a variety of different tasks, but what is common to all of their activities, a slave's function as it were, is to obey the master. In this sense, it would clearly be better to possess those "souls of slaves" that could both obey and disobey their master than those that can only involuntarily disobey. What is not so clear is whether the slave that *chooses* to disobey the master would likely be doing so for what his master would regard as good reasons. This seems possible only when the slave is not actually fit to be a slave, i.e. when he can "see" more clearly than his master.[17] Institutionalized slavery--where due to war, economic domination, and tradition, some group of human beings is enslaved to another with no consideration given to individual capacity--would often result in situations of this sort. But there may be other forms of true master-slave relationships than those between individual human beings. The relationship between the soul and the body is ideally such and the same may be true of the various parts of the soul itself. A human being is not going to accomplish much of value in life if he allows his "body" to govern his actions, spending his time graftifying various physical pleasures, whether these are of the grosser variety such as gluttony and indolence or less physically harmful things such as being fanatical about fine wine and food or being addicted to exercise. With respect to the various parts of the soul, assuming that there is a "rational" part and a "desiring" part, we have seen how allowing oneself to be ruled by

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[17] cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, transl. by Carnes Lord, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Bk. I, ch.s 4-5.

anger can have terrible consequences, and the same seems true of such desires or passions such as fear, envy, and love. The better human being learns how to rule these things when they could harm him or others.

Thus we finally get to a consideration of the soul simply. Socrates asks Hippias whether we would not "... wish to possess our own soul in as good a condition as possible?"[18] (375c11 ff.) Hippias, sensibly enough, says yes. Socrates' next question gets no such agreement. Asked whether the soul would "be better if it effects evil voluntarily and goes wrong or if it does so involuntarily," Hippias maintains his initial position that "It would ... be a terrible thing ... if those doing injustice voluntarily are to be better than those doing so involuntarily." We note that Socrates does not mention injustice (he has not since 372d6 when he first opposed Hippias' view), whereas this is the only thing that Hippias refers to. In his response, Socrates does not dispute Hippias' inclusion of injustice, and says that the argument appears to show that "they" are indeed better. Hippias maintains that it does not to him. But he is wrong. The argument of the second proof, each proposition of which Hippias accedes to, indeed implies that the best souls could do evil voluntarily. In all the activities and arts or sciences considered, it was the better practitioner who could voluntarily choose to do *both* what is shameful and good with respect to its proper work. Presuming, then, that there is a proper work for the soul itself, it is the better soul that will be able to voluntarily do both the shameful and good things appropriate to it. Earlier we were reminded that all human beings desire what is good for them, as Socrates has just now reaffirmed by asking whether we would "not wish to possess our own [soul] in as good a condition as possible?" Determining and doing what is good may, then, be the proper activity of the soul, just as running fast is for the runner, singing in tune for the voice, hitting the target for the archer, and so forth. Certainly, many human beings

[18] Or, alternatively, "... in the best possible condition?"

actively pursue the "good" (whatever their conception or conceptions of it may be), or at least think that they should. This would seem to be the appropriate end in all the myriad activities of human existence, just as obeying the master was in the slave's varied activities. What would be shameful and bad for the soul, in this case, would be to do what is harmful or evil for oneself. Theoretically, then, the better soul voluntarily could do what is both good for itself and what is evil for itself. Whether it ever *would* choose to do the latter is another question. But the worse soul, lacking the power to exercise its proper activity, may well do what is evil for itself, and that "involuntarily." The question that remains is whether justice, perhaps an adequate provisional description of it in this context would be "not harming others," is good for oneself. If it is, with respect to activities of the human soul, the two senses of bad in the dialogue would in essence be one. A human being who did unjust things would be doing what is bad in relation to the proper purpose of a human being, i.e. to look to the good. Until the question of whether justice is good for one is answered, the analysis of the good soul will not help us understand whether the better soul is one which voluntarily does both justice and injustice.

We are not surprised, then, that Socrates now turns to a consideration of justice. He asks Hippias whether justice is not "a certain capacity [power] or knowledge or ... both," adding an apparently rhetorical question whether it must not consist of one of these alternatives. When Hippias agrees, Socrates proceeds to draw out the implications of the preceding definition of justice, asking the sophist a series of questions: "if justice is a capacity of the soul, is not the more capable soul more just," or if it is knowledge, "Is not the wiser soul more just and the more ignorant more unjust," or if it is both, "Is not the one having both ... more just, while the more ignorant is more unjust?"[19]

[19] It is curious that Socrates does not mention the less capable soul in either of the two applicable examples above, i.e. the less capable soul is not said to be more unjust, while the more ignorant one is.

(375e2 ff.) Hippias agrees, though once again not with perfect certainty. Hippias' agreement is only justified if justice is the *only* power, or the *only* wisdom, of a soul; it may be, but this has certainly not been shown. We could as easily say, for example, that medicine being a certain capacity and knowledge of the soul, the one possessing both "capacity and knowledge" will be a better doctor. At this point, Socrates seems to be "sophistically" conflating justice with the other arts or sciences, apparently not attending much about its special nature. By doing so, he seems to want Hippias to think that the conclusions of the previous arguments regarding various areas of expertise are applicable to justice. Socrates reminds Hippias of these conclusions by asking him whether "the *more capable* and *wiser* [soul] came to sight as better and as more capable of doing both what is noble and what is shameful with regard to *all* that it effects?" (375e11-76a2; emphasis added) Hippias says yes. At this point, Socrates seems to be bringing together elements of both the first and second proofs of the dialogue, perhaps in order to point out how lying, just like running badly, may be used for both just and unjust purposes.[20] Earlier, the "more capable" and "wiser" soul was explicitly found to be better with respect to lying and telling the truth, and not with respect to the activities considered in the second proof; although the practice of the latter does implicitly require capacity or power and knowledge of the "art," whether this is knowing how to wrestle or a more technical sort of expertise. And in the context of lying and telling the truth, there was no mention of what was noble or shameful, only that the same one both lies and tells the truth. These ideas of the noble/beautiful and the shameful/ugly were

[20] Although we have seen that lying is in an important sense "morally neutral," just as running badly or singing out of tune, and that the the test of the better body or soul is whether it can do both the "bad" and the "good" when it so desires, if lying is analagous to the "worse" things of the second proof it would seem to be something "bad" in relation to the proper end of the soul. One of the important teachings of the dialogue is that being truthful to oneself (or not lying involuntarily) is the sign of a better human being. And, "ideally," honesty may be what is good for men's souls even in their relationships with each other. As Hippias' reactions typify, there seems to be an instinctive desire that human relationships be conducted without artifice and deception. Part of this desire may stem from our need for communion or intimacy with other beings, a communion that is not possible if one does not trust someone. cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond*, aphorism 183.

introduced explicitly only in the second proof of the dialogue, first mentioned in connection with running. But as we have seen, Hippias regards lying as something that is simply and unqualifiedly shameful. Socrates now completes the connection of justice with the earlier activities, saying that "... whenever [the more capable and wiser soul] effects shameful things, it effects them voluntarily through capacity and art, but these things are evidently characteristics of justice, either both or one of them."[21] (376a4-6)

Socrates can now proceed with the argument that those who do injustice do so voluntarily. But first he says that "... to do injustice at least is to do what is bad, while not to do injustice is to do what is noble."[22] (376a8-9) We note that Socrates does not say for whom this is bad. If construed as "bad for himself," the implication seems to be that he who is capable of doing injustice voluntarily, would never choose to do so. Socrates asks Hippias whether "the more capable and better soul [will] not do injustice voluntarily--at least whenever it does injustice--while the more worthless will do so involuntarily?" (376a11-13) According to the "argument," this is true, but only on the assumption that expertise in justice is like expertise or skill in the other areas considered in the second proof, something which has not been considered in the dialogue. For some reason Hippias agrees with what Socrates says, although with hesitation. Perhaps he remembers that the "more capable" and "better" soul was previously shown to be a liar, which, to him, is something obviously unjust. Socrates now asks Hippias whether the "good man [is] the one who has the good soul, while the bad is the one who has the bad soul?" (376b1 ff.) Hippias agrees, and on that apparently unobjectionable basis Socrates concludes that "it is characteristic of a good man to do injustice voluntarily,

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21 After just speaking about capacity and *knowledge* as being the means by which the better soul does things and as the components of justice, Socrates now substitutes *art* for knowledge. Perhaps he does so in order to make the identification of justice as an art more complete.

22 It is curious that Socrates opposes bad (κακοσ) here with καλον (noble) and not αγαθοσ (good). Is he implying that it is nobility of spirit that prevents the good man from not doing injustice, and not the concern for his own good?

while it is characteristic of a bad man to do so involuntarily, if, that is, the good man has a good soul." At this point, then, Socrates implies that justice is good for the soul, but he has offered no proof of this, although his act of piety to the god may be an indication of what his views are on the matter. The fact that the Platonic dialogue on justice is more than twenty times as long as the *Lesser Hippias* is a strong indication that Plato's views on the subject will not be found here. Hippias is sure that the good man has a good soul, but when Socrates says, "Well, then, he who voluntarily goes wrong and does what is shameful and unjust ... *if indeed there is any such person*, would be no other than the good man," Hippias says that he "cannot agree" with him. (376b7 ff.; emphasis added) Assuming for the moment that justice is good for the soul (and that the soul's proper activity is aiming at what is good for itself), Socrates' hesitation that there is any such human being is justified by the view that no one would voluntarily choose to harm himself (which is not to say, as Aristotle implies, that the good man may not choose to feign injustice).

We see, then, that the argument that the human being who does injustice voluntarily is better than the one who does so involuntarily is also sophistical. Socrates seems to have made two attempts to prove the point: 1) by conflating justice with the other arts and skills considered in the dialogue, and 2) by assuming that justice is good for the just man and more specifically for his own soul. But it is not clear that the first analogy fits, and the second issue is not addressed in the dialogue. This may be why Socrates says that he cannot agree with himself either, although saying ironically, that it appears to be "... the necessary result of the argument." And whatever apparently unsalutary views have been proposed are called into radical doubt by Socrates' own professed uncertainty on the subject: "As I said before, however, I vacillate back and forth about these things, and they never seem the same to me." Socrates (or Plato) must, however, have had very serious considerations in mind for taking the dialogue in

this direction. He implicitly showed us in the first proof and through the example of Odysseus, that lying and the myriad other kinds of deception in life, can be put to either good use or bad. But there was no explicit consideration of how one is to determine what the good reasons are for lying. Human beings seem to have some instinctive knowledge (gained from experience) of what such reasons are. But, ultimately, to really know when it is good to lie one has to know what the good is for human beings, something which only serious reflection can provide. It is certainly not enough to accept the conventional views on these matters, i.e. the views promulgated in one's regime and "beautifully" articulated by those such as Hippias, and thus be an involuntary liar, if one truly wants to act well and justly. By accepting Hippias' objection to the position that Odysseus is the better man, Socrates has shown that all the powers that human beings possess are like the ability to lie in that they can be utilized for either good or evil purposes, and that the only way of determining whether one is using them properly is by examining what the good is in human life and the nature of justice. The greater a human being's ignorance about such things, or the more he involuntarily lies to himself about the most important things, the more he seems fated to do both harm to himself and others even without desiring to, just as Hippias and Achilles do. The only possible "salvation" seems to be philosophy. In this light, it is interesting that the word here for "vacillate," πλανωμαι, also means to "wander." Socrates is thus once again identified with Odysseus. Like Odysseus, who always kept his goal in mind, never succumbing to pain, pleasure, or discouragement, so too Socrates behaves in respect to his goal, the truth. Unlike Odysseus, however, Socrates seems unlikely to ever reach his final destination; but without making the attempt, there is clearly no hope of answering the important questions in life, or even realizing what they are. Of course, if a human being mistakenly thinks that he is perfectly wise, a "sophist" like Hippias, he will never even start on such an odyssey. Socrates

appropriately ends the dialogue with some ironic barbs thrown in Hippias' direction, reminding the listeners to the conversation (and us) of the sophist's megalomania and devastating ignorance about himself and the things that are. Socrates says his own vacillation is "nothing marvelous," or that of "any other ordinary man." (We note that Socrates carefully does not say that he *is* an ordinary man.) He next says to Hippias, "But if you who are wise will also vacillate, this is a terrible thing for us as well, if we shall not cease from our vacillation even after we have come to you." He does not say that it is something marvelous if the "wise" such as Hippias should vacillate but that the repercussions on others of their vacillation is a terrible thing. Socrates has clearly revealed, in the course of this discussion, to Eudicus and any others remaining who have understood these goings on, the uselessness, if not danger, of looking to sophists such as Hippias for aid in the pursuit of wisdom. He has also revealed the identity of one who may rightly claim to be a true educator of the Greeks.

VIII. Conclusion

Far from sowing "the seeds of moral indifferentism," then, the *Lesser Hippias* reveals the true foundation of morality. It is only by knowing whether justice is good for man, and what other things are good for his soul that a human being can be confident that he is acting well. And the only way of acquiring such knowledge is by serious reflection on human life. One must endeavour to become wise or, in other words, one must "philosophize." Plato's dialogues allow us to do precisely this. By examining the purpose behind Socrates' "sophistical" arguments in the *Lesser Hippias*, we learn the nature of Hippias' ignorance and thus the ignorance of all those who are successful promoters of the conventional viewpoint; and by examining the arguments' "flaws," as well as by carefully considering the implications of Socrates' apparently ordinary examples, we actually *learn* a great deal about the issues at hand, much more than we would by reading a treatise that systematically laid out Plato's views on the matter. Thus our understanding of the world, that which constitutes our being in a sense, is increased, more of the world itself being illumined and made visible to our mind's eye.

In the course of our study, then, we have learned how important a role "lying" or the "false" plays in human life. It permeates almost every activity that human beings engage in and seems necessary in a world that is characterized by both good and evil. We have also seen that lying can be used for both good and evil purposes. In the second part of the dialogue we saw that all human actions can be similarly utilized and that knowing when it is good to lie or tell the truth, run slowly or fast, pretend to see poorly or not, and so forth, depends ultimately on understanding what the good really is for human beings. By examining our own instinctive feelings on the matter and whatever knowledge we possess about such things, in light of the words and deeds of

this dialogue, we can come to some understanding of what Plato actually teaches about these matters, and thus possibly increase our understanding of what the good truly is for human beings. Socrates' reference to Odysseus as better, for instance, seems to reveal that lying is justified against one's enemies and in ruling men for their own benefit; and from Socrates' own behavior in the *Lesser Hippias* we see that it is also justified when one is doing something good for others, in this instance revealing Hippias' ignorance and the danger of looking to him for guidance in the "pursuit of philosophy." Socrates' activity in the *Lesser Hippias*, i.e. his act of piety to the god, and the example of Achilles also intimates that justice is something good for the soul. But answering all the larger questions this dialogue raises is the work of a lifetime.

Because the dialogue teaches us the importance of knowing both what the good is and what justice is, we truly see that "everything" ultimately depends on not being an involuntary liar, i.e. on not being ignorant. Hippias' ignorance causes him to be a ridiculous fool as well as endangering those who trust in his instruction, much as Achilles' causes great suffering both to the Achaians and himself. But it does not seem to be enough to realize that such involuntary lying is bad, since human beings seem particularly adept at practicing "sophistry" on themselves, from a variety of causes. In order for a human being to really *know* what is true to the extent that his nature allows, he may have to have an overwhelming desire for truth and/or for doing the right thing in his soul, such as Odysseus had for his wife, family, and kingdom and which enabled him to withstand many trials of both pains and pleasures. For without such a desire, it would certainly be difficult to develop the courage required for setting out on an odyssey that promises no safe harbour.

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